

STORIES BY WOMEN



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A selection of 15 public domain tales by women – some famous, some not-so-famous -- from the mid-19th to mid 20th centuries that range from the sentimental to the humorous, from horror to old-fashioned romance, from the city to the country, and even to outer space.

A Field

By Minnie Stichter, from The Project Gutenberg EBook of **Prairie Gold**, by Various

Sometime I expect to turn a sharp corner and come face to face with myself, according to the ancient maxim, "extremes meet." For, did I not vow to the Four Great Walls that had imprisoned me for nine months, that I would fly to the uttermost parts of the earth so soon as vacation should open the doors? And did I not spend almost my entire summer within sight of my home, and in a field of a few acres dimension?

I caught sight of some flowers, just inside the barbed wire fencing the track, that were fairer than any I had yet gathered for my vases. As the old song has it, "O, brighter the flowers on the other side seem!" No one saw me get under that six-stranded barbed-wire fence, and I am not going to tell how I did it. But when I got through I felt as well guarded as though attended by a retinue of soldiers. And I found myself in another world--a dream-world!

It was a large field rosy with red clover and waving with tall timothy. A single tree glistened and rustled invitingly. In its shade I rested, refreshing myself with the field sights and sounds and fragrances. It was delightful to be the center of so much beauty as circled round about me. Then I had only to rest on the rosy clover-carpet at the foot of the tree, and the tall grass eclipsed all things earthly save the tree, and the sky overhead, and the round mat of clover under the tree which the grass ringed about. I had often wished for Siegfried's magic cloak. Well, here was something quite as good, which, if it did not render me invisible to the world, made the world invisible to me. Who of you would not be glad to have the old world with its "everyday endeavors and desires," its folly, its pride and its tears, drop out of sight for a while, leaving you in a flowery zone of perfect quiet and beauty, hedged in by a wall of grass!

There were many "afterwards." And the marvel of it all was that, for all I could do, the field retained its virgin splendor and kept the secret of my goings-in and comings-out most completely.

After the daisies, there came a season of black-eyed Susans. That was when the grasses were tallest and the feeling of mystery did most abound. I know I had been there many days before I discovered the myriads of wild roses near the crabtree thicket--those fairies' flowers so exquisite in their pink frailty that mortal breath is rude. Only when I reached the hedge, bounding the remote side of the field, did I enter into my full inheritance. Along a barbed-wire fence had grown up sumac, elderberry, crabtrees and nameless brambles, while over all trailed the wild grapevine, bearing the most perfect miniature clusters, fit to be sculptured by Trentanove into immortal

beauty. And this hedge was the source of ever increasing wonder the whole summer long. I depended on it alone for sensational denouements after the grass was cut for hay. When the field lay shorn, like other fields about it far and wide, I could not have been lured hitherward but for the hedge. There the hard green berries of a peculiar bramble ripened into wax-white pellet-sized drops clustered together on a woody stem by the most coral-pink pedicles ever designed by sea-sprites.

In its time came the elderberry bloom, and its purple fruit; the garnet fruit of the sumach and its flaming foliage; the lengths of vines and their purple clusters--all these and more also ministered to my delight.

About goldenrod time, the school-bell rang me in from the field, but I managed to take recesses long enough to behold the kaleidoscopic views brought before me by the turning of nature's hand. The smooth velvety green of the field with its border of gold and lavender--great widths of thistle and goldenrod following the line of fence--was like the brodered mantle of some celestial Sir Walter Raleigh, spread for the queens of earth. I was no queen; but I did not envy royalty, since I doubted if it had any such cherished possessions as my field in its various phases.

In the November days, the brightness of the fields seemed to be inverted and to be seen in the opalescent tints of the sky. Then, the clearness of the atmosphere, the wider horizon, the less hidden homes and doings of men, had this message for the children of men: "If there is any secret in your life, leave it out."

When it is December and the fields are too snowy and wind-swept for pleasure-grounds, where the only bits of brightness are the embroideries of the scarlet pips of the wild-rose, it is good to nestle by the cozy fireside and conjure it all up again, and nourish a feeling of expectancy for the spring and summer that shall come. Again, the flowers and waving grass and drowsy warmth of the summer day; again, the songs of flitting birds, the scented sweets of the new-mown hay. Again the work of the fields goes on before me like a play in pantomime! Again, with my eyes, I follow home the boys with their cows, to the purple rim of the hill beyond which only my fancy has ever gone. Again I quit work with the tired laborer. Again I dream of the open, free, unfettered song that life might be if it were lived more simply, with less of artificiality. And again, for the sake of one patient toiler in the town, whose life-task admits of no holiday, I have the grace to return thither and begin where I left off--the life common to you and to me, the life ordained for us from the beginning.



THAT'S MARRIAGE [1917]

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of **One Basket**, by Edna Ferber

Theresa Platt (she had been Terry Sheehan) watched her husband across the breakfast table with eyes that smoldered. But Orville Platt was quite unaware of any smoldering in progress. He was occupied with his eggs. How could he know that these very eggs were feeding the dull red menace in Terry Platt's eyes?

When Orville Platt ate a soft-boiled egg he concentrated on it. He treated it as a great adventure. Which, after all, it is. Few adjuncts of our daily life contain the element of chance that is to be found in a three-minute breakfast egg.

This was Orville Platt's method of attack: first, he chipped off the top, neatly. Then he bent forward and subjected it to a passionate and relentless scrutiny. Straightening--preparatory to plunging his spoon therein--he flapped his right elbow. It wasn't exactly a flap; it was a pass between a hitch and a flap, and presented external evidence of a mental state. Orville Platt always gave that little preliminary jerk when he was contemplating a serious step, or when he was moved, or argumentative. It was a trick as innocent as it was maddening.

Terry Platt had learned to look for that flap--they had been married four years--to look for it, and to hate it with a morbid, unreasoning hate. That flap of the elbow was tearing Terry Platt's nerves into raw, bleeding fragments.

Her fingers were clenched tightly under the table, now. She was breathing unevenly. "If he does that again," she told herself, "if he flaps again when he opens the second egg, I'll scream. I'll scream. I'll scream! I'll sc----"

He had scooped the first egg into his cup. Now he picked up the second, chipped it, concentrated, straightened, then--up went the elbow, and down, with the accustomed little flap.

The tortured nerves snapped. Through the early-morning quiet of Wetona, Wisconsin, hurtled the shrill, piercing shriek of Terry Platt's hysteria.

"Terry! For God's sake! What's the matter!"

Orville Platt dropped the second egg, and his spoon. The egg yolk trickled down his plate. The spoon made a clatter and flung a gay spot of yellow on the cloth. He started toward her.

Terry, wild-eyed, pointed a shaking finger at him. She was laughing, now, uncontrollably. "Your elbow! Your elbow!"

"Elbow?" He looked down at it, bewildered, then up, fright in his face. "What's the matter with it?"

She mopped her eyes. Sobs shook her. "You f-f-flapped it."

"F-f-f----" The bewilderment in Orville Platt's face gave way to anger. "Do you mean to tell me that you screeched like that because my--because I moved my elbow?"

"Yes."

His anger deepened and reddened to fury. He choked. He had started from his chair with his napkin in his hand. He still clutched it. Now he crumpled it into a wad and hurled it to the center of the table, where it struck a sugar bowl, dropped back, and uncrumpled slowly, reprovingly. "You--you----" Then bewilderment closed down again like a fog over his countenance. "But why? I can't see----"

"Because it--because I can't stand it any longer. Flapping. This is what you do. Like this."

And she did it. Did it with insulting fidelity, being a clever mimic.

"Well, all I can say is you're crazy, yelling like that, for nothing."

"It isn't nothing."

"Isn't, huh? If that isn't nothing, what is?" They were growing incoherent. "What d'you mean, screeching like a maniac? Like a wild woman? The neighbors'll think I've killed you. What d'you mean, anyway!"

"I mean I'm tired of watching it, that's what. Sick and tired."

"Y'are, huh? Well, young lady, just let me tell YOU something----"

He told her. There followed one of those incredible quarrels, as sickening as they are human, which can take place only between two people who love each other; who love each other so well that each knows with cruel certainty the surest way to wound the other; and who stab, and tear, and claw at these vulnerable spots in exact proportion to their love.

Ugly words. Bitter words. Words that neither knew they knew flew between them like sparks between steel striking steel.

From him: "Trouble with you is you haven't got enough to do. That's the trouble with half you women. Just lay around the house, rotting. I'm a fool, slaving on the road to keep a good-for-nothing----"

"I suppose you call sitting around hotel lobbies slaving! I suppose the house runs itself! How about my evenings? Sitting here alone, night after night, when you're on the road."

Finally, "Well, if you don't like it," he snarled, and lifted his chair by the back and slammed it down, savagely, "if you don't like it, why don't you get out, hm? Why don't you get out?"

And from her, her eyes narrowed to two slits, her cheeks scarlet:

"Why, thanks. I guess I will."

Ten minutes later he had flung out of the house to catch the 8:19 for Manitowoc. He marched down the street, his shoulders swinging rhythmically to the weight of the burden he carried--his black leather handbag and the shiny tan sample case, battle-scarred, both, from many encounters with ruthless porters and busmen and bellboys. For four years, as he left for his semi-monthly trip, he and Terry had observed a certain little ceremony (as had the neighbors). She would stand in the doorway, watching him down the street, the heavier sample case banging occasionally at his shin. The depot was only three blocks away. Terry watched him with fond but unillusioned eyes, which proves that she really loved him. He was a dapper, well-dressed fat man, with a weakness for pronounced patterns in suitings, and addicted to derbies. One week on the road, one week at home. That was his routine. The wholesale grocery trade liked Platt, and he had for his customers the fondness that a traveling salesman has who is successful in his territory. Before his marriage to Terry Sheehan his little red address book had been overwhelming proof against the theory that nobody loves a fat man.

Terry, standing in the doorway, always knew that when he reached the corner just where Schroeder's house threatened to hide him from view, he would stop, drop the sample case, wave his hand just once, pick up the sample case and go on, proceeding backward for a step or two until Schroeder's house made good its threat. It was a comic scene in the eyes of the onlooker, perhaps because a chubby Romeo offends the sense of fitness. The neighbors, lurking behind their parlor curtains, had laughed at first. But after a while they learned to look for that little scene, and to take it unto themselves, as if it were a personal thing. Fifteen-year wives whose husbands had long since abandoned flowery farewells used to get a vicarious thrill out of it, and to eye

Terry with a sort of envy.

This morning Orville Platt did not even falter when he reached Schroeder's corner. He marched straight on, looking steadily ahead, the heavy bags swinging from either hand. Even if he had stopped--though she knew he wouldn't--Terry Platt would not have seen him. She remained seated at the disordered breakfast table, a dreadfully still figure, and sinister; a figure of stone and fire, of ice and flame. Over and over in her mind she was milling the things she might have said to him, and had not. She brewed a hundred vitriolic cruelties that she might have flung in his face. She would concoct one biting brutality, and dismiss it for a second, and abandon that for a third. She was too angry to cry--a dangerous state in a woman. She was what is known as cold mad, so that her mind was working clearly and with amazing swiftness, and yet as though it were a thing detached; a thing that was no part of her.

She sat thus for the better part of an hour, motionless except for one forefinger that was, quite unconsciously, tapping out a popular and cheap little air that she had been strumming at the piano the evening before, having bought it downtown that same afternoon. It had struck Orville's fancy, and she had played it over and over for him. Her right forefinger was playing the entire tune, and something in the back of her head was following it accurately, though the separate thinking process was going on just the same. Her eyes were bright, and wide, and hot. Suddenly she became conscious of the musical antics of her finger. She folded it in with its mates, so that her hand became a fist. She stood up and stared down at the clutter of the breakfast table. The egg--that fateful second egg--had congealed to a mottled mess of yellow and white. The spoon lay on the cloth. His coffee, only half consumed, showed tan with a cold gray film over it. A slice of toast at the left of his plate seemed to grin at her with the semi-circular wedge that he had bitten out of it.

Terry stared down at these congealing remnants. Then she laughed, a hard high little laugh, pushed a plate away contemptuously with her hand, and walked into the sitting room. On the piano was the piece of music (Bennie Gottschalk's great song hit, "Hicky Boola") which she had been playing the night before. She picked it up, tore it straight across, once, placed the pieces back to back, and tore it across again. Then she dropped the pieces to the floor.

"You bet I'm going," she said, as though concluding a train of thought. "You just bet I'm going. Right now!" And Terry went. She went for much the same reason as that given by the ladye of high degree in the old English song--she who had left her lord and bed and board to go with the raggle-taggle gipsies--O! The thing that was sending Terry Platt away was much more than a conjugal quarrel precipitated by a soft-boiled egg and a flap of the arm. It went so deep that it is necessary to delve back to the days when Theresa Platt was Terry

Sheehan to get the real significance of it, and of the things she did after she went.

When Mrs. Orville Platt had been Terry Sheehan, she had played the piano, afternoons and evenings, in the orchestra of the Bijou Theater, on Cass Street, Wetona, Wisconsin. Anyone with a name like Terry Sheehan would, perforce, do well anything she might set out to do. There was nothing of genius in Terry, but there was something of fire, and much that was Irish. Which meant that the Watson Team, Eccentric Song and Dance Artists, never needed a rehearsal when they played the Bijou. Ruby Watson used merely to approach Terry before the Monday performance, sheet music in hand, and say, "Listen, dearie. We've got some new business I want to wise you to. Right here it goes 'TUM dee-dee DUM dee-dee TUM DUM DUM.' See? Like that. And then Jim vamps. Get me?"

Terry, at the piano, would pucker her pretty brow a moment. Then, "Like this, you mean?"

"That's it! You've got it."

"All right. I'll tell the drum."

She could play any tune by ear, once heard. She got the spirit of a thing, and transmitted it. When Terry played a martial number you tapped the floor with your foot, and unconsciously straightened your shoulders. When she played a home-and-mother song you hoped that the man next to you didn't know you were crying (which he probably didn't, because he was weeping, too).

At that time motion pictures had not attained their present virulence. Vaudeville, polite or otherwise, had not yet been crowded out by the ubiquitous film. The Bijou offered entertainment of the cigar-box-tramp variety, interspersed with trick bicyclists, soubrettes in slightly soiled pink, trained seals, and Family Fours with lumpy legs who tossed each other about and struck Goldbergian attitudes.

Contact with these gave Terry Sheehan a semiprofessional tone. The more conservative of her townspeople looked at her askance. There never had been an evil thing about Terry, but Wetona considered her rather fly. Terry's hair was very black, and she had a fondness for those little, close-fitting scarlet turbans. Terry's mother had died when the girl was eight, and Terry's father had been what is known as easygoing. A good-natured, lovable, shiftless chap in the contracting business. He drove around Wetona in a sagging, one-seated cart and never made any money because he did honest work and charged as little for it as men who did not. His mortar stuck, and his bricks did not crumble, and his lumber did not crack. Riches are not acquired in the contracting business in that way. Ed Sheehan and his daughter were great friends. When he died (she was nineteen) they say she screamed once, like a

banshee, and dropped to the floor.

After they had straightened out the muddle of books in Ed Sheehan's gritty, dusty little office Terry turned her piano-playing talent to practical account. At twenty-one she was still playing at the Bijou, and into her face was creeping the first hint of that look of sophistication which comes from daily contact with the artificial world of the footlights.

There are, in a small Midwest town like Wetona, just two kinds of girls. Those who go downtown Saturday nights, and those who don't. Terry, if she had not been busy with her job at the Bijou, would have come in the first group. She craved excitement. There was little chance to satisfy such craving in Wetona, but she managed to find certain means. The traveling men from the Burke House just across the street used to drop in at the Bijou for an evening's entertainment. They usually sat well toward the front, and Terry's expert playing, and the gloss of her black hair, and her piquant profile as she sometimes looked up toward the stage for a signal from one of the performers caught their fancy, and held it.

She found herself, at the end of a year or two, with a rather large acquaintance among these peripatetic gentlemen. You occasionally saw one of them strolling home with her. Sometimes she went driving with one of them on a Sunday afternoon. And she rather enjoyed taking Sunday dinner at the Burke Hotel with a favored friend. She thought those small-town hotel Sunday dinners the last word in elegance. The roast course was always accompanied by an aqueous, semifrozen concoction which the bill of fare revealed as Roman Punch. It added a royal touch to the repast, even when served with roast pork.

Terry was twenty-two when Orville Platt, making his initial Wisconsin trip for the wholesale grocery house he represented, first beheld her piquant Irish profile, and heard her deft manipulation of the keys. Orville had the fat man's sense of rhythm and love of music. He had a buttery tenor voice, too, of which he was rather proud.

He spent three days in Wetona that first trip, and every evening saw him at the Bijou, first row, center. He stayed through two shows each time, and before he had been there fifteen minutes Terry was conscious of him through the back of her head. Orville Platt paid no more heed to the stage, and what was occurring thereon, than if it had not been. He sat looking at Terry, and wagging his head in time to the music. Not that Terry was a beauty. But she was one of those immaculately clean types. That look of fragrant cleanliness was her chief charm. Her clear, smooth skin contributed to it, and the natural penciling of her eyebrows. But the thing that accented it, and gave it a last touch, was the way in which her black hair came down in a little point just in the center of her forehead, where hair meets brow. It grew to form what is known as a cowlick. (A prettier name for it is widow's

peak.) Your eye lighted on it, pleased, and from it traveled its gratified way down her white temples, past her little ears, to the smooth black coil at the nape of her neck. It was a trip that rested you.

At the end of the last performance on the night of his second visit to the Bijou, Orville waited until the audience had begun to file out. Then he leaned forward over the rail that separated orchestra from audience.

"Could you," he said, his tones dulcet, "could you oblige me with the name of that last piece you played?"

Terry was stacking her music. "George!" she called to the drum. "Gentleman wants to know the name of that last piece." And prepared to leave.

"My Georgia Crackerjack," said the laconic drum.

Orville Platt took a hasty side step in the direction of the door toward which Terry was headed. "It's a pretty thing," he said fervently. "An awful pretty thing. Thanks. It's beautiful."

Terry flung a last insult at him over her shoulder: "Don't thank ME for it. I didn't write it."

Orville Platt did not go across the street to the hotel. He wandered up Cass Street, and into the ten-o'clock quiet of Main Street, and down as far as the park and back. "Pretty as a pink! And play! ... And good, too. Good."

A fat man in love.

At the end of six months they were married. Terry was surprised into it. Not that she was not fond of him. She was; and grateful to him, as well. For, pretty as she was, no man had ever before asked Terry to be his wife. They had made love to her. They had paid court to her. They had sent her large boxes of stale drugstore chocolates, and called her endearing names as they made cautious declarations such as:

"I've known a lot of girls, but you've got something different. I don't know. You've got so much sense. A fellow can chum around with you. Little pal."

Wetona would be their home. They rented a comfortable, seven-room house in a comfortable, middle-class neighborhood, and Terry dropped the red velvet turbans and went in for picture hats. Orville bought her a piano whose tone was so good that to her ear, accustomed to the metallic discords of the Bijou instrument, it sounded out of tune. She

played a great deal at first, but unconsciously she missed the sharp spat of applause that used to follow her public performance. She would play a piece, brilliantly, and then her hands would drop to her lap. And the silence of her own sitting room would fall flat on her ears. It was better on the evenings when Orville was home. He sang, in his throaty, fat man's tenor, to Terry's expert accompaniment.

"This is better than playing for those ham actors, isn't it, hon?" And he would pinch her ear.

"Sure"--listlessly.

But after the first year she became accustomed to what she termed private life. She joined an afternoon sewing club, and was active in the ladies' branch of the U.C.T. She developed a knack at cooking, too, and Orville, after a week or ten days of hotel fare in small Wisconsin towns, would come home to sea-foam biscuits, and real soup, and honest pies and cake. Sometimes, in the midst of an appetizing meal he would lay down his knife and fork and lean back in his chair, and regard the cool and unruffled Terry with a sort of reverence in his eyes. Then he would get up, and come around to the other side of the table, and tip her pretty face up to his.

"I'll bet I'll wake up, someday, and find out it's all a dream. You know this kind of thing doesn't really happen--not to a dub like me."

One year; two; three; four. Routine. A little boredom. Some impatience. She began to find fault with the very things she had liked in him: his superneatness; his fondness for dashing suit patterns; his throaty tenor; his worship of her. And the flap. Oh, above all, that flap! That little, innocent, meaningless mannerism that made her tremble with nervousness. She hated it so that she could not trust herself to speak of it to him. That was the trouble. Had she spoken of it, laughingly or in earnest, before it became an obsession with her, that hideous breakfast quarrel, with its taunts, and revilings, and open hate, might never have come to pass.

Terry Platt herself didn't know what was the matter with her. She would have denied that anything was wrong. She didn't even throw her hands above her head and shriek: "I want to live! I want to live! I want to live!" like a lady in a play. She only knew she was sick of sewing at the Wetona West End Red Cross shop; sick of marketing, of home comforts, of Orville, of the flap.

Orville, you may remember, left at 8:19. The 11:23 bore Terry Chicago-ward. She had left the house as it was--beds unmade, rooms unswept, breakfast table uncleared. She intended never to come back.

Now and then a picture of the chaos she had left behind would flash across her order-loving mind. The spoon on the tablecloth.

Orville's pajamas dangling over the bathroom chair. The coffeepot on the gas stove.

"Pooh! What do I care?"

In her pocketbook she had a tidy sum saved out of the housekeeping money. She was naturally thrifty, and Orville had never been niggardly. Her meals when Orville was on the road had been those sketchy, haphazard affairs with which women content themselves when their household is manless. At noon she went into the dining car and ordered a flaunting little repast of chicken salad and asparagus and Neapolitan ice cream. The men in the dining car eyed her speculatively and with appreciation. Then their glance dropped to the third finger of her left hand, and wandered away. She had meant to remove it. In fact, she had taken it off and dropped it into her bag. But her hand felt so queer, so unaccustomed, so naked, that she had found herself slipping the narrow band on again, and her thumb groped for it, gratefully.

It was almost five o'clock when she reached Chicago. She felt no uncertainty or bewilderment. She had been in Chicago three or four times since her marriage. She went to a downtown hotel. It was too late, she told herself, to look for a less expensive room that night. When she had tidied herself she went out. The things she did were the childish, aimless things that one does who finds herself in possession of sudden liberty. She walked up State Street, and stared in the windows; came back, turned into Madison, passed a bright little shop in the window of which taffy-white and gold--was being wound endlessly and fascinatingly about a double-jointed machine. She went in and bought a sackful, and wandered on down the street, munching.

She had supper at one of those white-tiled sarcophagi that emblazon Chicago's downtown side streets. It had been her original intention to dine in state in the rose-and-gold dining room of her hotel. She had even thought daringly of lobster. But at the last moment she recoiled from the idea of dining alone in that wilderness of tables so obviously meant for two.

After her supper she went to a picture show. She was amazed to find there, instead of the accustomed orchestra, a pipe organ that panted and throbbed and rumbled over lugubrious classics. The picture was about a faithless wife. Terry left in the middle of it.

She awoke next morning at seven, as usual, started up wildly, looked around, and dropped back. Nothing to get up for. The knowledge did not fill her with a rush of relief. She would have her breakfast in bed. She telephoned for it, languidly. But when it came she got up and ate it from the table, after all.

That morning she found a fairly comfortable room, more within her means, on the North Side in the boardinghouse district. She unpacked and hung up her clothes and drifted downtown again, idly. It was noon when she came to the corner of State and Madison Streets. It was a maelstrom that caught her up, and buffeted her about, and tossed her helplessly this way and that.

The thousands jostled Terry, and knocked her hat awry, and dug her with unheeding elbows, and stepped on her feet.

"Say, look here!" she said once futilely. They did not stop to listen. State and Madison has no time for Terrys from Wetona. It goes its way, pell-mell. If it saw Terry at all it saw her only as a prettyish person, in the wrong kind of suit and hat, with a bewildered, resentful look on her face.

Terry drifted on down the west side of State Street, with the hurrying crowd. State and Monroe. A sound came to Terry's ears.

A sound familiar, beloved. To her ear, harassed with the roar and crash, with the shrill scream of the whistle of the policeman at the crossing, with the hiss of feet shuffling on cement, it was a celestial strain. She looked up, toward the sound. A great second-story window opened wide to the street. In it a girl at a piano, and a man, red-faced, singing through a megaphone. And on a flaring red and green sign:

BERNIE GOTTSCHALK'S MUSIC HOUSE!

COME IN! HEAR BERNIE GOTTSCHALK'S LATEST HIT!
THE HEART-THROB SONG THAT HAS GOT 'EM ALL!
THE SONG THAT MADE THE SQUAREHEADS CRAWL!

"I COME FROM PARIS, ILLINOIS, BUT OH! YOU PARIS, FRANCE!
I USED TO WEAR BLUE OVERALLS BUT NOW IT'S KHAKI PANTS."

COME IN! COME IN!

Terry accepted.

She followed the sound of the music. Around the corner. Up a little flight of stairs. She entered the realm of Euterpe; Euterpe with her hair frizzed; Euterpe with her flowing white robe replaced by soiled white shoes; Euterpe abandoning her flute for jazz. She sat at the piano, a red-haired young lady whose familiarity with the piano had bred contempt. Nothing else could have accounted for her treatment of it. Her fingers, tipped with sharp-pointed and glistening nails, clawed the keys with a dreadful mechanical motion. There were stacks

of music sheets on counters and shelves and dangling from overhead wires. The girl at the piano never ceased playing. She played mostly by request.

A prospective purchaser would mumble something in the ear of one of the clerks. The fat man with the megaphone would bawl out, "Hicky Boola, Miss Ryan!" And Miss Ryan would oblige. She made a hideous rattle and crash and clatter of sound.

Terry joined the crowds about the counter. The girl at the piano was not looking at the keys. Her head was screwed around over her left shoulder and as she played she was holding forth animatedly to a girl friend who had evidently dropped in from some store or office during the lunch hour. Now and again the fat man paused in his vocal efforts to reprimand her for her slackness. She paid no heed. There was something gruesome, uncanny, about the way her fingers went their own way over the defenseless keys. Her conversation with the frowzy little girl went on.

"Wha'd he say?" (Over her shoulder.)

"Oh, he laffed."

"Well, didja go?"

"Me! Well, whutya think I yam, anyway?"

"I woulda took a chanst."

The fat man rebelled.

"Look here! Get busy! What are you paid for? Talkin' or playin'? Huh?"

The person at the piano, openly reprov'd thus before her friend, lifted her uninspired hands from the keys and spake. When she had finished she rose.

"But you can't leave now," the megaphone man argued. "Right in the rush hour."

"I'm gone," said the girl. The fat man looked about, helplessly. He gazed at the abandoned piano, as though it must go on of its own accord. Then at the crowd.

"Where's Miss Schwimmer?" he demanded of a clerk.

"Out to lunch."

Terry pushed her way to the edge of the counter and leaned over. "I can

play for you," she said.

The man looked at her. "Sight?"

"Yes."

"Come on."

Terry went around to the other side of the counter, took off her hat and coat, rubbed her hands together briskly, sat down, and began to play. The crowd edged closer.

It is a curious study, this noonday crowd that gathers to sate its music hunger on the scraps vouchsafed it by Bernie Gottschalk's Music House. Loose-lipped, slope-shouldered young men with bad complexions and slender hands. Girls whose clothes are an unconscious satire on present-day fashions. On their faces, as they listen to the music, is a look of peace and dreaming. They stand about, smiling a wistful half smile. The music seems to satisfy a something within them. Faces dull, eyes lusterless, they listen in a sort of trance.

Terry played on. She played as Terry Sheehan used to play. She played as no music hack at Bernie Gottschalk's had ever played before. The crowd swayed a little to the sound of it. Some kept time with little jerks of the shoulder--the little hitching movement of the dancer whose blood is filled with the fever of syncopation. Even the crowd flowing down State Street must have caught the rhythm of it, for the room soon filled.

At two o'clock the crowd began to thin. Business would be slack, now, until five, when it would again pick up until closing time at six. The fat vocalist put down his megaphone, wiped his forehead, and regarded Terry with a warm blue eye. He had just finished singing "I've Wandered Far from Dear Old Mother's Knee." (Bernie Gottschalk Inc. Chicago. New York. You can't get bit with a Gottschalk hit. 15 cents each.)

"Girlie," he said, emphatically, "you sure--can--play!" He came over to her at the piano and put a stubby hand on her shoulder. "Yessir! Those little fingers----"

Terry just turned her head to look down her nose at the moist hand resting on her shoulder. "Those little fingers are going to meet your face if you don't move on."

"Who gave you your job?" demanded the fat man.

"Nobody. I picked it myself. You can have it if you want it."

"Can't you take a joke?"

"Label yours."

As the crowd dwindled she played less feverishly, but there was nothing slipshod about her performance. The chubby songster found time to proffer brief explanations in asides. "They want the patriotic stuff. It used to be all that Hawaiian dope, and Wild Irish Rose stuff, and songs about wanting to go back to every place from Dixie to Duluth. But now seems it's all these here flag wavers. Honestly, I'm so sick of 'em I got a notion to enlist to get away from it."

Terry eyed him with withering briefness. "A little training wouldn't ruin your figure."

She had never objected to Orville's embonpoint. But then, Orville was a different sort of fat man; pink-cheeked, springy, immaculate.

At four o'clock, as she was in the chorus of "Isn't There Another Joan of Arc?" a melting masculine voice from the other side of the counter said "Pardon me. What's that you're playing?"

Terry told him. She did not look up. "I wouldn't have known it. Played like that--a second 'Marseillaise.' If the words----What are the words? Let me see a----"

"Show the gentleman a 'Joan,'" Terry commanded briefly, over her shoulder. The fat man laughed a wheezy laugh. Terry glanced around, still playing, and encountered the gaze of two melting masculine eyes that matched the melting masculine voice. The songster waved a hand uniting Terry and the eyes in informal introduction.

"Mr. Leon Sammett, the gentleman who sings the Gottschalk songs wherever songs are heard. And Mrs.--that is--and Mrs. Sammett----"

Terry turned. A sleek, swarthy world-old young man with the fashionable concave torso, and alarmingly convex bone-rimmed glasses. Through them his darkly luminous gaze glowed upon Terry. To escape their warmth she sent her own gaze past him to encounter the arctic stare of the large blonde who had been included so lamely in the introduction. And at that the frigidity of that stare softened, melted, dissolved.

"Why, Terry Sheehan! What in the world!"

Terry's eyes bored beneath the layers of flabby fat. "It's--why, it's Ruby Watson, isn't it? Eccentric Song and Dance----"

She glanced at the concave young man and faltered. He was not Jim, of the Bijou days. From him her eyes leaped back to the fur-bedecked splendor of the woman. The plump face went so painfully red that the

make-up stood out on it, a distinct layer, like thin ice covering flowing water. As she surveyed that bulk Terry realized that while Ruby might still claim eccentricity, her song-and-dance days were over. "That's ancient history, m' dear. I haven't been working for three years. What're you doing in this joint? I'd heard you'd done well for yourself. That you were married."

"I am. That is I--well, I am. I----"

At that the dark young man leaned over and patted Terry's hand that lay on the counter. He smiled. His own hand was incredibly slender, long, and tapering.

"That's all right," he assured her, and smiled. "You two girls can have a reunion later. What I want to know is can you play by ear?"

"Yes, but----"

He leaned far over the counter. "I knew it the minute I heard you play. You've got the touch. Now listen. See if you can get this, and fake the bass."

He fixed his somber and hypnotic eyes on Terry. His mouth screwed up into a whistle. The tune--a tawdry but haunting little melody--came through his lips. Terry turned back to the piano. "Of course you know you flatted every note," she said.

This time it was the blonde who laughed, and the man who flushed. Terry cocked her head just a little to one side, like a knowing bird, looked up into space beyond the piano top, and played the lilting little melody with charm and fidelity. The dark young man followed her with a wagging of the head and little jerks of both outspread hands. His expression was beatific, enraptured. He hummed a little under his breath and anyone who was music-wise would have known that he was just a half beat behind her all the way.

When she had finished he sighed deeply, ecstatically. He bent his lean frame over the counter and, despite his swart coloring, seemed to glitter upon her--his eyes, his teeth, his very fingernails.

"Something led me here. I never come up on Tuesdays. But something----"

"You was going to complain," put in his lady, heavily, "about that Teddy Sykes at the Palace Gardens singing the same songs this week that you been boosting at the Inn."

He put up a vibrant, peremptory hand. "Bah! What does that matter now! What does anything matter now! Listen Miss--ah--Miss----?"

"Pl--Sheehan. Terry Sheehan."

He gazed off a moment into space. "Hm. 'Leon Sammett in Songs. Miss Terry Sheehan at the Piano.' That doesn't sound bad. Now listen, Miss Sheehan. I'm singing down at the University Inn. The Gottschalk song hits. I guess you know my work. But I want to talk to you, private. It's something to your interest. I go on down at the Inn at six. Will you come and have a little something with Ruby and me? Now?"

"Now?" faltered Terry, somewhat helplessly. Things seemed to be moving rather swiftly for her, accustomed as she was to the peaceful routine of the past four years.

"Get your hat. It's your life chance. Wait till you see your name in two-foot electrics over the front of every big-time house in the country. You've got music in you. Tie to me and you're made." He turned to the woman beside him. "Isn't that so, Rube?"

"Sure. Look at ME!" One would not have thought there could be so much subtle vindictiveness in a fat blonde.

Sammett whipped out a watch. "Just three quarters of an hour. Come on, girlie."

His conversation had been conducted in an urgent undertone, with side glances at the fat man with the megaphone. Terry approached him now.

"I'm leaving now," she said.

"Oh, no, you're not. Six o'clock is your quitting time."

In which he touched the Irish in Terry. "Any time I quit is my quitting time. She went in quest of hat and coat much as the girl had done whose place she had taken early in the day. The fat man followed her, protesting. Terry, putting on her hat, tried to ignore him. But he laid one plump hand on her arm and kept it there, though she tried to shake him off.

"Now, listen to me. That boy wouldn't mind grinding his heel on your face if he thought it would bring him up a step. I know'm. See that walking stick he's carrying? Well, compared to the yellow stripe that's in him, that cane is a Lead pencil. He's a song tout, that's all he is." Then, more feverishly, as Terry tried to pull away: "Wait a minute. You're a decent girl. I want to--Why, he can't even sing a note without you give it to him first. He can put a song over, yes. But how? By flashing that toothy grin of his and talking every word of it. Don't you----"

But Terry freed herself with a final jerk and whipped around the counter. The two, who had been talking together in an undertone,

turned to welcome her. "We've got a half-hour. Come on. It's just over to Clark and up a block or so."

The University Inn, that gloriously intercollegiate institution which welcomes any graduate of any school of experience, was situated in the basement, down a flight of stairs. Into the unwonted quiet that reigns during the hour of low potentiality, between five and six, the three went, and seated themselves at a table in an obscure corner. A waiter brought them things in little glasses, though no order had been given. The woman who had been Ruby Watson was so silent as to be almost wordless. But the man talked rapidly. He talked well, too. The same quality that enabled him, voiceless though he was, to boost a song to success was making his plea sound plausible in Terry's ears now.

"I've got to go and make up in a few minutes. So get this. I'm not going to stick down in this basement eating house forever. I've got too much talent. If I only had a voice--I mean a singing voice. But I haven't. But then, neither had Georgie Cohan, and I can't see that it wrecked his life any. Now listen. I've got a song. It's my own. That bit you played for me up at Gottschalk's is part of the chorus. But it's the words that'll go big. They're great. It's an aviation song, see? Airplane stuff. They're yelling that it's the airyoplanes that're going to win this war. Well, I'll help 'em. This song is going to put the aviator where he belongs. It's going to be the big song of the war. It's going to make 'Tipperary' sound like a Moody and Sankey hymn. It's the----"

Ruby lifted her heavy-lidded eyes and sent him a meaning look. "Get down to business, Leon. I'll tell her how good you are while you're making up."

He shot her a malignant glance, but took her advice. "Now what I've been looking for for years is somebody who has got the music knack to give me the accompaniment just a quarter of a jump ahead of my voice, see? I can follow like a lamb, but I've got to have that feeler first. It's more than a knack. It's a gift. And you've got it. I know it when I see it. I want to get away from this night-club thing. There's nothing in it for a man of my talent. I'm gunning for bigger game. But they won't sign me without a tryout. And when they hear my voice they---- Well, if me and you work together we can fool 'em. The song's great. And my make-up's one of these aviation costumes to go with the song, see? Pants tight in the knee and baggy on the hips. And a coat with one of those full-skirt whaddyoucall-'ems----"

"Peplums," put in Ruby, placidly.

"Sure. And the girls'll be wild about it. And the words!" He began to sing, gratingly off key:

Put on your sky clothes,
Put on your fly clothes,
And take a trip with me.
We'll sail so high
Up in the sky
We'll drop a bomb from Mercury.

"Why, that's awfully cute!" exclaimed Terry. Until now her opinion of Mr. Sammett's talents had not been on a level with his.

"Yeah, but wait till you hear the second verse. That's only part of the chorus. You see, he's supposed to be talking to a French girl. He says:

'I'll parlez-vous in Francais plain
You'll answer, "Cher Americain,"
We'll both ..."

The six-o'clock lights blazed up suddenly. A sad-looking group of men trailed in and made for a corner where certain bulky, shapeless bundles were soon revealed as those glittering and tortuous instruments which go to make a jazz band.

"You better go, Lee. The crowd comes in awful early now, with all these buyers in town."

Both hands on the table, he half rose, reluctantly, still talking.
"I've got three other songs. They make Gottschalk's stuff look sick. All I want's a chance. What I want you to do is accompaniment. On the stage, see? Grand piano. And a swell set. I haven't quite made up my mind to it. But a kind of an army camp room, see? And maybe you dressed as Liberty. Anyway, it'll be new, and a knockout. If only we can get away with the voice thing. Say, if Eddie Foy, all those years never had a----"

The band opened with a terrifying clash of cymbal and thump of drum.
"Back at the end of my first turn," he said as he Red. Terry followed his lithe, electric figure. She turned to meet the heavy-lidded gaze of the woman seated opposite. She relaxed, then, and sat back with a little sigh. "Well! If he talks that way to the managers I don't see----"

Ruby laughed a mirthless little laugh. "Talk doesn't get it over with the managers, honey. You've got to deliver."

"Well, but he's--that song is a good one. I don't say it's as good as he thinks it is, but it's good."

"Yes," admitted the woman, grudgingly, "it's good."

"Well, then?"

The woman beckoned a waiter; he nodded and vanished, and reappeared with a glass that was twin to the one she had just emptied. "Does he look like he knew French? Or could make a rhyme?"

"But didn't he? Doesn't he?"

"The words were written by a little French girl who used to skate down here last winter, when the craze was on. She was stuck on a Chicago kid who went over to fly for the French."

"But the music?"

"There was a Russian girl who used to dance in the cabaret and she----"

Terry's head came up with a characteristic little jerk. "I don't believe it!"

"Better." She gazed at Terry with the drowsy look that was so different from the quick, clear glance of the Ruby Watson who used to dance so nimbly in the old Bijou days. "What'd you and your husband quarrel about, Terry?"

Terry was furious to feel herself flushing. "Oh, nothing. He just--I--it was---- Say, how did you know we'd quarreled?"

And suddenly all the fat woman's apathy dropped from her like a garment and some of the old sparkle and animation illumined her heavy face. She pushed her glass aside and leaned forward on her folded arms, so that her face was close to Terry's.

"Terry Sheehan, I know you've quarreled, and I know just what it was about. Oh, I don't mean the very thing it was about; but the kind of thing. I'm going to do something for you, Terry, that I wouldn't take the trouble to do for most women. But I guess I ain't had all the softness knocked out of me yet, though it's a wonder. And I guess I remember too plain the decent kid you was in the old days. What was the name of that little small-time house me and Jim used to play? Bijou, that's it; Bijou."

The band struck up a new tune. Leon Sammett--slim, sleek, lithe in his evening clothes--appeared with a little fair girl in pink chiffon. The woman reached across the table and put one pudgy, jeweled hand on Terry's arm. "He'll be through in ten minutes. Now listen to me. I left Jim four years ago, and there hasn't been a minute since then, day or night, when I wouldn't have crawled back to him on my hands and knees if I could. But I couldn't. He wouldn't have me now. How could

he? How do I know you've quarreled? I can see it in your eyes. They look just the way mine have felt for four years, that's how. I met up with this boy, and there wasn't anybody to do the turn for me that I'm trying to do for you. Now get this. I left Jim because when he ate corn on the cob he always closed his eyes and it drove me wild. Don't laugh."

"I'm not laughing," said Terry.

"Women are like that. One night--we was playing Fond du Lac; I remember just as plain--we was eating supper before the show and Jim reached for one of those big yellow ears, and buttered and salted it, and me kind of hanging on to the edge of the table with my nails. Seemed to me if he shut his eyes when he put his teeth into that ear of corn I'd scream. And he did. And I screamed. And that's all."

Terry sat staring at her with a wide-eyed stare, like a sleepwalker. Then she wet her lips slowly. "But that's almost the very----"

"Kid, go on back home. I don't know whether it's too late or not, but go anyway. If you've lost him I suppose it ain't any more than you deserve; but I hope to God you don't get your deserts this time. He's almost through. If he sees you going he can't quit in the middle of his song to stop you. He'll know I put you wise, and he'll prob'ly half kill me for it. But it's worth it. You get."

And Terry--dazed, shaking, but grateful--fled. Down the noisy aisle, up the stairs, to the street. Back to her rooming house. Out again, with her suitcase, and into the right railroad station somehow, at last. Not another Wetona train until midnight. She shrank into a remote corner of the waiting room and there she huddled until midnight, watching the entrances like a child who is fearful of ghosts in the night.

The hands of the station clock seemed fixed and immovable. The hour between eleven and twelve was endless. She was on the train. It was almost morning. It was morning. Dawn was breaking. She was home! She had the house key clutched tightly in her hand long before she turned Schroeder's corner. Suppose he had come home! Suppose he had jumped a town and come home ahead of his schedule. They had quarreled once before, and he had done that.

Up the front steps. Into the house. Not a sound. She stood there a moment in the early-morning half-light. She peered into the dining room. The table, with its breakfast debris, was as she had left it. In the kitchen the coffeepot stood on the gas stove. She was home. She was safe. She ran up the stairs, got out of her clothes and into gingham morning things. She flung open windows everywhere. Downstairs once more she plunged into an orgy of cleaning. Dishes, table, stove, floor, rugs. She washed, scoured, swabbed, polished. By eight o'clock

she had done the work that would ordinarily have taken until noon. The house was shining, orderly, and redolent of soapsuds.

During all this time she had been listening, listening, with her subconscious ear. Listening for something she had refused to name definitely in her mind, but listening, just the same; waiting.

And then, at eight o'clock, it came. The rattle of a key in the lock. The boom of the front door. Firm footsteps.

He did not go to meet her, and she did not go to meet him. They came together and were in each other's arms. She was weeping.

"Now, now, old girl. What's there to cry about? Don't, honey; don't. It's all right." She raised her head then, to look at him. How fresh and rosy and big he seemed, after that little sallow restaurant rat.

"How did you get here? How did you happen----?"

"Jumped all the way from Ashland. Couldn't get a sleeper, so I sat up all night. I had to come back and square things with you, Terry. My mind just wasn't on my work. I kept thinking how I'd talked--how I'd talked----"

"Oh, Orville, don't! I can't bear---- Have you had your breakfast?"

"Why, no. The train was an hour late. You know that Ashland train."

But she was out of his arms and making for the kitchen. "You go and clean up. I'll have hot biscuits and everything in no time. You poor boy. No breakfast!"

She made good her promise. It could not have been more than half an hour later when he was buttering his third feathery, golden-brown biscuit. But she had eaten nothing. She watched him, and listened, and again her eyes were somber, but for a different reason. He broke open his egg. His elbow came up just a fraction of an inch. Then he remembered, and flushed like a schoolboy, and brought it down again, carefully. And at that she gave a tremulous cry, and rushed around the table to him.

"Oh, Orville!" She took the offending elbow in her two arms, and bent and kissed the rough coat sleeve.

"Why, Terry! Don't, honey. Don't!"

"Oh, Orville, listen----"

"Yes."

"Listen, Orville----"

"I'm listening, Terry."

"I've got something to tell you. There's something you've got to know."

"Yes, I know it, Terry. I knew you'd out with it, pretty soon, if I just waited."

She lifted an amazed face from his shoulder then, and stared at him.
"But how could you know? You couldn't! How could you?"

He patted her shoulder then, gently. "I can always tell. When you have something on your mind you always take up a spoon of coffee, and look at it, and kind of joggle it back and forth in the spoon, and then dribble it back into the cup again, without once tasting it. It used to get me nervous, when we were first married, watching you. But now I know it just means you're worried about something, and I wait, and pretty soon----"

"Oh, Orville!" she cried then. "Oh, Orville!"

"Now, Terry. Just spill it, hon. Just spill it to Daddy. And you'll feel better."



FROM ACROSS THE HALL

by Dorothy Canfield,
from the Internet Archive etext of **The Real Motive**, 1916

There was a note of intense seriousness in the mother's voice as she announced the news. Mr. Parker shifted his cigar and folded his newspaper to a fresh page.

" Oh, I guess it'll be all right," he responded vaguely to his wife's tocsin of alarm.

" I hope so ! " she answered dryly.

" She's had lots of callers before " he remarked,
" and I don't believe this " His voice died away
in an inarticulate murmur.

" Boys she's grown up next door to, and went to
High School with ! " Her gesture dismissed them, as
negligible quantities.

" Oh, she's only a child herself, Ellie is, if she has
had time to outgrow this town's small social life and
take to college-settlementing and "

He left his sentence unfinished again. Some one
had said of the Parkers that they were never known
to complete the sentences they began to each other.

The mother's rejoinder was a laugh. She evidently
considered that they were now embarked upon one of
their usual evening conversations, for she began a
leisurely, reflective monologue.

" Isn't it odd," she mused, not looking up from her
sewing, " how you can see the funny absurdities of
children and laugh over them, even when at the very
same minute you're simply agonizing over the soul-
destroying possibilities involved in those same quali-
ties?"

The silence from the other side of the table made
her look up quickly. " You're going to sleep! " she
accused him.

He started and opened one eye. " I'm not if you
can help it, am I? What's the matter? The plumb-
ing again ? "

" Nothing so important. It's only whether the man
your daughter is falling in love with is a fit person
for her, and whether he's falling in love with her!
And it's been going on for the whole last fortnight,
ever since you've been away."

" Well, keep your bulletins up to date, Mother dear,"
he said whimsically. " You know I can't know any-
thing about my daughter but what you tell me."

" There's just enough truth in that to make angels
weep ! " she cried vehemently. " And if we had it
to do over again I think I should make you give up

lawyering and take to shoemaking, with your shop right in the house here, so that Ellie could grow up to know you by sight at least."

" Ah, but nowadays shoemakers don't see their children, either. They work in factories."

" Well, anyhow " — the mother refused to be drawn into a side issue — " she met him at the Powells' two weeks ago, and he called the very next evening. She put off Charlie Atwater, who was coming that evening, so she could see him without another caller. I heard her 'phoning a fib to Charlie about having a headache. I never knew Ellie to do such a thing before, and it made me wonder. And then when this Mr. Thayer came to call, I knew."

" I don't doubt it." The father aroused himself for a slow laugh. " I don't doubt you knew what the trimming on the bridesmaids' dresses was to be as soon as you heard the door-bell ring."

" Well, you'd have been struck as speechless as I was if you'd seen the expression on Ellie's face when he first came in." Her voice, always vibrating sensitively to the emotion of the moment, began to tremble. " Why, it made my heart stand still. The poor child might as well have called out to him, ' Come and take me ! ' " She began to laugh shakily.

" My only comfort is that men are such fools they never see anything. He probably thought her greeting was very cool, and wondered if he'd been too forward to call so soon. Oh, if it weren't such a tragic matter," she concluded, " wouldn't they be too deliciously absurd, young people in the mating years! Do you remember the first evening you came to see me when we "

Her husband laughed out loud.

" I was just thinking of that. Did you look at me as though you called out ?"

" Oh, I was crazy about you from the first," his wife avowed ; " but you were you, and who knows who this man is ? "

" But by your own reckoning they've only known each other two weeks. Aren't you going pretty fast

to "

" He's called five times, gone to church with her once, they've taken two walks together, and they've met ' by accident ' three times as she left the college-settlement house to come home."

The father laughed at the exactitude of the information, but he drew his bulky figure upright in the chair.

" Who is this energetic Thayer person ? "

His wife gave a gesture of triumph at his awakened attention and proceeded succinctly to make the most of it.

" I understand he comes of a Cleveland family. His father is a professor in the Western Reserve, his mother was a Detroit girl, and she's now president of a woman's club in Cleveland. He graduated from the Ohio State University, and took a lot of electrical work at the G. E. in Schenectady, and he's now assistant superintendent of the street railways here at a salary of two thousand a year."

Mr. Parker gazed at his wife wide-eyed.

" And when was he born, and where is he at this moment, and what is he thinking about, and "

" He's right across the hall in the parlor this minute, calling on your daughter, and as to what he's thinking about, I'd give a good deal to know."

The father's weary impassivity was not yet wholly stirred.

" Well, we're plain, Middle-Western American parents. There's nothing for us to do but to keep our hands off, is there? And, anyhow, all that secret-service information of yours makes him out all right, doesn't it? Just about our kind of folks, and "

" I said I understood all that ! " his wife interrupted.

" I don't know if any of it is true, do I ? And even if we should have found out that his father is not a drunkard or he an embezzler, we don't know whether he's the kind of person to make Ellie happy, do we? "

The father looked across the table into his wife's

eyes with the rich interchange of unspoken meanings of those who have lived their lives in close communion. Then, although he still spoke lightly, he patted her shoulder before he left the room.

" Well, Mother, I'm afraid if you've taken the trouble to gather all that report, there's no good excuse for my not at least crossing the hall to have a look at things — oh, I'll make an errand/' he laughed, pausing at the door and cutting short the suggestion he read in his wife's hastily upturned face. " I'll — I'll — why, I'll go in to see if the man fixed that gas-lamp all right."

When he came back he evaded for a time the inquiry in his wife's eyes. He let himself down heavily into his chair and sighed, the fatigue in his face deepening as though a curtain were drawn across it.

" That trip to Cincinnati gets harder every time I take it," he said.

"Well?" asked his wife.

" Oh, I don't think he'll bite," — the lawyer picked up his paper again — " but what Ellie sees in him !"

" Oh, then, you see, too, that she "

He would not admit it. " I don't see anything. You said she did."

" Well, she does."

The mother summed it up with a somber finality on which she rested, even though her husband apparently sank back into his former slough of callous abstraction.

" Oh, I guess it'll be all right," he said again, beginning to read.

It was a week before she knew that his indifference was a screen to hide from himself his own concern.

" I ran into some Cleveland people to-day, Mollie," he told her, " and asked them casually about this young Thayer. They gave him a very good name. Seemed to like him. Said he showed promise."

" How did you like him ? " asked the mother after a pause.

"I hated him!"

She was not startled by the suddenness of this outburst of parental jealousy.

" Yes, I know. I feel that way myself sometimes ; but if Ellie likes him, and if he's all right — How did you really like him?"

" Oh, well enough. He didn't seem very much at his ease with me, so it was hard to "

" Didn't he? " she broke in eagerly. " Well, that's a good sign he's serious and not just amusing himself."

"Looky here, "Mother," he said resentfully, "anybody'd think we wanted to get Ellie off our hands instead of — As if she wasn't good enough and pretty enough for anybody in the world."

" That doesn't make any difference. Being pretty — being good — being anything doesn't make any difference."

" What does ? " he asked with an air of being about to run her triumphantly into a blank wall.

" I don't know what does. It's all a chance."

He smoked silently, considering this statement. When he spoke there was in his voice the note his wife loved, the steadfastness on which she had leaned all her life. " Was it all a chance with us? " he asked gravely.

She dropped her sewing. " Oh, I knew when I first saw you. But suppose you hadn't liked me that first evening ? "

" I think I ' knew ' as much as you did, and that was mighty little. It's something you have to allow time to, for it to grow — . But oh! does it seem possible? Why, it's not more than last week that she was just learning to walk. Do you remember? How she put out her hand for the cookie, and then before we knew

what she was doing had run across to me? How proud and frightened she looked. Do you remember how her eyes shone, and she panted and clung to my knee?"

" I remember," said the mother.

They both looked up as the door opened.

"Mother," asked the daughter, "would it be all right for me to go skating a while with Mr. Thayer? All the crowd are down on the lake in Monett Park this evening."

The young man consulted his watch.

" I promise to bring her back safe no later than ten," he said, laughing a little for no reason.

"Why, yes, I think so," consented the mother.
" Put your fur around your neck. You're hardly over that cold yet."

When they had gone she was the first to break the silence.

" Her crowd will notice that. It's the first time she's ever really gone out that way with a young man who isn't one of her old boy friends."

The father made no comment. His eyes were on an article about the currency.

" Did you notice," asked the mother, " that she looked just as she did years ago — the time you were speaking about. Did you see how bright her eyes shone, and how quickly her breath came, and how proud, yet "

He laid down the paper. " Don't ! " he cried. " You mean that this time it's away from us she's "

They said no more, but after a time he moved his chair so that his hand rested on his wife's.

By the end of a fortnight, however, a reactionary change of mood had come over them.

"We're as bad as any other absurd anxious parents," said the father cheerfully. " Just because a

young man comes calling on our daughter once or twice "

" If he comes to-night it'll be the eleventh time," she interposed accurately.

"Well, eleven times." He conceded it and still clung to his point. " That's no reason to "

" No, of course it isn't," she assented. " And Ellie is a great deal too young to be thinking seriously of such — Why, she's only a little over twenty! "

"You were " he began.

" But that was different." She silenced him quickly. " Ellie told me to-day she thought nobody ought to marry before thirty. She may seem to like him, but anybody can tell by her attitude that she'd be horrified to be expected to marry him. Not but what he's well enough, too."

The father unfolded his paper with a return to his settled middle-aged confidence in the stability of things which had not been his since the subject was first broached. The mother began the accounts for the month with a cheerful dash of her pen.

" I suppose it'll come some time," she said, " with such an attractive girl as Ellie, but there's nothing in this! "

There fell about them one of their peaceable mutual silences, broken only by the rattle of the newspaper and the scratch of the pen.

The door-bell rang. The mother listened with uplifted pen-point. " That's his laugh."

"What of it?" the father reassured her. "How many times did you receive calls from that Hewitt boy I used to "

She laughed. " Yes, we're a pair of "

" Don't count me in ! I always said it would come to nothing."

The turn of his phrase seeming to be definite proof that it had come to nothing, there was another silence,

serene and companionable.

Then, looking up from her ledger, " Do you know, they say that nowadays they are putting babies into short clothes when they are only two months old," remarked the mother.

The father laid down the paper and surveyed her solemnly.

" Well, Mollie Parker ! " he said accusingly.

" What is it ? " she asked startled, not at first catching his meaning.

His tired, heavy face was softened by a slow smile.

She denied the unspoken charge with all her quick, hot vehemence, instantly thereafter admitting it.
" How in the world could you know I was thinking of "

He confessed humorously, " Because just at that moment I was noticing an advertisement in the paper of an apartment-house on Elm Street, and was wondering how they would be if Ellie and... "

Elliptically she let him see her greater quickness, and that she had outrun him.

" No, the rents are too high there," she said with all gravity, although the crows' feet at the corners of her eyes deepened with suppressed laughter at herself.
" On two thousand a year you can't afford — and, anyhow, in that house three rooms out of six open on an airshaft."

He broke into an open laugh. " You are too good to be true ! " he cried.

She started guiltily.

" Hush ! That's the parlor door. Here comes Ellie. You don't suppose he has already "

The door opened, the daughter came in. She looked at her father, time-beaten and gray, his unshapely bulk heavy in his chair, absorbed in the financial pages of his paper, and at her mother bending her faded face above the household accounts.

" I don't suppose you know where our volume of Keats is," her clear young voice rang with accusing certainty.

" No, my dear," said her father mildly. " I haven't looked inside Keats for a great many years."

" I remember dusting it when we cleaned house" — her mother glanced up from her addition — " but I haven't seen it since."

As she looked for it, running her finger along the books, the girl explained : " Mr. Thayer wants to read me a passage from the Endymion. He's very fond of Keats — oh, here it is, back of one of father's law books — no, it isn't — yes, it is — he's very fond of all poetry — and literature — and art "

After the door had closed an abysmal silence lay on the room.

Finally, " How do you feel ? " asked the mother.

" Absolutely crushed by realization of our crass, gross, materialistic view toward... "

She feared he was carrying it off too lightly.

" Well, it was horrid in us to think such things about such unconscious young people. Ellie'd have a right never to forgive us if she knew."

He tipped his head back against the chair and gazed reflectively at the ceiling.

" So they've gotten along to reading poetry. Who did we read, Mother ? "

She answered both the apparent and the hidden meaning of his speech. " Yes, doesn't it bring it all back to you ? I've thought more about those days since this began than in years before. Why, we read Longfellow, and Tennyson, and Lowell "

" And Owen Meredith."

" Well, not Tupper, at least ! " she laughed. Then suddenly serious, even wistful, she continued : " Why don't we read poetry any more ? "

" Grown-ups live on beefsteak and potatoes, not on chocolate eclairs," he told her bravely.

" Ah, that's bluster. You know it's sad we don't. It comes over me with a shock. To have lost poetry out of our lives ! " She could not palliate the matter. Her husband lifted himself heavily from his chair and stood smiling down at her. She gazed back, sure as always that he had an answer to her every problem.

" You child," he said, putting his hand on her gray hair. " Must you have it out of a book ? How long have we been married? How long have we still to live — together?"

Ten days later. " He's going away on a business trip," the mother told him the instant they were alone together after dinner in the library. Her haste seemed to indicate her sense of some hidden importance in the news.

" Well, what of it? " he asked. " So am I."

" Everything ! " she cried dramatically. " Letters ! "

" I suppose so," he admitted slowly.

" I know so ! They've known each other six weeks — oh, a very concentrated six weeks, and an absence at this time — it'll decide everything for them. One says more in letters — one keeps them and reads them over and makes sure they're real."

He minimized the significance of her tidings to calm her agitation over it. " Be sure you pay as much attention to mine," he said, laughing. " I notice my departure makes no such stir in the world. Oh, come, you'll find when I come back that nothing so vital has happened to them after all."

But when he returned, even his sluggish masculine inertia before sentimental crises was not proof against the tragic atmosphere of his house.

After the lamentable affair which was his first dinner at home, " Good heavens ! What's happened ? " he burst out at his wife, as soon as Ellie had pleaded a headache and gone upstairs.

" It's too horrible ! " she cried, catching his hand in hers. "Life is. There is so much more suffering than joy. Oh, it is not worth the agony of living it!"

He had not seen her in this mood of angry misery since the days of Ellie's childish illnesses, when the mother's anxiety tore at the too responsive strings of her heart till the pain seemed more than she could bear. His easygoing indifference dropped from him at the sight of her. He took her hands in his and held them closely, waiting for the relaxation he knew would come at his touch.

" What has happened ? " he said again, very quietly. She began to whisper rapidly.

" He hasn't written her at all, not once, and she had sent him three letters before she realized he was not answering them. Of course I don't know what she said in them, but I think he must have almost spoken out before he left and she has written accordingly, and now thinks he is laughing at her. My Ellie ! My little girl ! " She was shivering and panting as though it were she whose maiden shyness had been violated. " I could kill him ! I could kill him ! " she ended.

He had a dozen reasonable explanations ready at once. " Why, how you women go off at half cock ! Perhaps he is sick — or was in a train wreck. There's a train wreck somewhere every day. Or found his father at death's door. Give a man a chance. He's not been gone more than ten days "

" Fifteen to-day," she corrected him.

" Well, even if worst comes to worst, if he is that sort of a trifler, it's better for Ellie to have found it out now than "

" Oh, yes, yes, yes, I would say so, too, if it were not for her having written those letters — such letters as I know from her face she did. It is criminal to allow innocent, ignorant girls such liberty as we American parents do. All her life she will be shamed before herself for those letters."

Still, his matter-of-fact suggestions — even more, his mere presence close to her again, reassured her. " Perhaps he is sick," she said, and then with a maternal

savagery which made first her husband and then herself smile, she added, " Oh, if he had only been killed in a train wreck ! It would be such a sufficient reason."

But the next evening her husband said, not sparing her, and exercising that prompt honesty they had so finely succeeded in keeping toward each other in every crisis :

" No, he is not sick, and he wasn't in a train wreck. There is nothing the matter with him. I looked up Peterson to-day. I knew he was just from Cleveland, and asked him point-blank if he had seen young Thayer. He said he took lunch with him yesterday at the club."

There was no outburst of indignation from the mother. Looking across the table at her he saw the slow tears creeping from under her closed lids.

" They are not for Ellie," she told him. " They are for me. She hurt me so to-day it seems my heart must burst. I could not bear it, to see her going about so still and white, with that look on her face — her girl's face that should be — I knew she would be happier for speaking out. I yearned so toward her. I put out my arms to her and said, ' Ellie, darling, tell Mother ! Don't keep it so to ' " Her voice failed, and when she went on it was so brokenly he could scarcely hear her.

" She pushed me away — she thrust me from her, Ellie did, so that it hurt me here." She laid her hand on her breast. " She pushed me away and ran upstairs and locked her door as though I were a spy." She went over it again like a litany of misery. " She pushed me away — her little hand that used to lie on my breast when she was nursing — my own baby "

This time the father had no quick comforting words. " I dare say she finds even herself in the room with her an intrusion on her these days. She must fight it out."

" But it would do her good to confide in "

" It would do you good to have her, you mean," he said with unsparing gravity.

" But it is wicked for her to draw away from her

own mother. What have I done to deserve it ! " she cried in hot self-defense. " I never kept anything from mine. If one is not close to one's own mother, what are human relationships worth? We are all in solitary imprisonment else "

" That is your way. Perhaps she has some of me in her. I never could confide in any one, not even my own mother."

" You never kept anything from me, did you? " the wife flashed out in jealous apprehension.

He looked at her, his faded brown eyes steady under the grizzling eyebrows. "No," he said gently; "no, Mollie, I never did."

When the full meaning of this came home to her, " Oh ! " she cried, springing up and going to him, " Oh, it is worth while, life is ! " And on this high note of triumph they ended their talk that evening.

The next evening she swept him off his feet by the exuberant exultance of her relief, vexed at his slowness in understanding the incoherencies of her story, flaming impatiently at his man's demand for a full explanation before he would believe. It was all a mistake, he gathered, even his trained sense for facts picking out with difficulty the main outline of things, "he had written, the letters had been addressed to North Hamilton Street instead of South — Good heavens! Why had they not thought of that! The letters had piled up at the main office till some mail clerk with a glimmering of sense had noticed them, and they had all come in a bunch to-day — spiles of them, millions! " — she reveled in their number with oriental extravagance — "more than one for every day he had been gone. And though Ellie had told her nothing definite, it seemed clear that he was wild with anxiety because she had stopped writing after those first three letters. And that morning she had telegraphed him — the reason, I suppose — and had had a telegram that he was coming at once, and she was expecting him any minute now "

At the ring of the door-bell the mother started, her hand going to her heart, her gray hair shading a quick flush like a girl's. " Oh ! " she cried. " Do something, quick! Read me — read me an article on the tariff, and make me listen. And I — I will darn some

stockings."

It was upon this scene that the door opened, a half-hour later, and " Oh, my darling! " cried the mother, her arms about the girl, blind to her companion, and deaf to the incoherencies he was stammering to the father.

After it was all over, the mother, mastering her voice enough to speak, said, " There, go back to your lover, dear. He and your father went across the hall. And send your father back to me. I know you want a quiet time to say your first good-night to each other." Still the girl lingered. It was only when her father's step, dragging a little with fatigue as usual, came toward the door that she lifted her head from her mother's lap, and rose from her knees. Her mother looked at her eyes, starlike through tears, at the red, perfect flower of her mouth, at the translucent brilliance of her cheeks. " My baby ! " she cried with incredulous pride. " My baby girl ! "

By the door the girl met her father, and from his arms she looked up into his face, all its heavy sagging lines close to her fresh bloom, and then back at her mother's thin, sallow cheeks. In her exclamation there throbbed a sudden burning sense of her own present ecstasy which brought with it a final fragrance of despair.

"Oh, I'm so happy! I suppose that never again," she cried, poised for flight on the threshold and quivering like a wind-blown flame, " never again can I be so happy as to-night ! "

The father looked after her in a silence which was broken by the mother's exclamation, " Oh, he is not good enough for her! He is not good enough for her!"

The father dropped into his chair. He was very pale. After a pause, " My little Ellie," he said under his breath.

A sudden hysterical laugh broke into the hush. " What do you think she said to me, the darling? She said she supposed it was a very great surprise to us."

" Did you hear," he asked musingly, " what she

said as she ?"

About never being again so happy-

He nodded. She was silent. The room about them seemed vibrant with a thousand ardent, full-veined memories of the past and with the rich certainty of the future.

" Come here," called the father suddenly. He took her spare, worn body into his arms and bent his gray head above hers.

" Ah, she has a lot to learn ! " said the husband to the wife.



THE DIAMOND BROOCHES

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of **The Militants**,
by Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews

The room was filled with signs of breeding and cultivation; it was bare of the things which mean money. Books were everywhere; family portraits, gone brown with time, hung on the walls; a tall silver candlestick gleamed from a corner; there was the tarnished gold of carved Florentine frames, such as people bring still from Italy. But the furniture-covering was faded, the carpet had been turned, the place itself was the small parlor of a cheap apartment, and the wall-paper was atrocious. The least thoughtful, listening for a moment to that language which a room speaks of those who live in it, would have known this at once as the home of well-bred people who were very poor.

So quiet it was that it seemed empty. If an observer had stood in the doorway, it might have been a minute before he saw that a man sat in front of the fireless hearth with his arms stretched before him on the table and his head fallen into them. For many minutes there was no sound, no stir of the man's nerveless pose; it might have been that he was asleep. Suddenly the characterless silence of the place was flooded

with tragedy, for the man groaned, and a child would have known that the sound came from a torn soul. He lifted his face--a handsome, high-bred face, clever, a bit weak,--and tears were wet on his cheeks. He glanced about as if fearing to be seen as he wiped them away, and at the moment there was a light bustle, low voices down the hall. The young man sprang to his feet and stood alert as a step came toward him. He caught a sharp breath as another man, iron-gray, professional, stood in the doorway.

"Doctor! You have made the examination--you think--" he flung at the newcomer, and the other answered with the cool incisive manner of one whose words weigh.

"Mr. Newbold," he said, "when you came to my office this morning I told you my conjectures and my fear. I need not, therefore, go into details again. I am very sorry to have to say to you--" he stopped, and looked at the younger man kindly. "I wish I might make it easier, but it is better that I should tell you that your mother's condition is as I expected."

Newbold gave way a step as if under a blow, and his color went gray. The doctor had seen souls laid bare before, yet he turned his eyes to the floor as the muscles pulled and strained in this young face. It seemed minutes that the two faced each other in the loaded silence, the doctor gazing gravely at the worn carpet, the other struggling for self-control. At last Newbold spoke, in the harsh tone which often comes first after great emotion.

"You mean that there is--no hope?"

And the doctor, relieved at the loosening of the tension, answered readily, glad to merge his humanity in his professional capacity: "No, Mr. Newbold; I do not mean just that. It is this bleak climate, the raw winds from the lake, which make it impossible for your mother to take the first step which might lead to recovery. There is, in fact--" he hesitated. "I may say that there is no hope for her cure while here. But if she is taken to a warm climate at once--at once--within two weeks--and kept there until summer, then, although I have not the gift of prophecy, yet I believe she would be in time a well woman. No medicine, can do it, but out-of-doors and warmth would do it--probably."

He put out his hand with a smile. "I am indeed glad that I may temper judgment with mercy," he said. "Try the south, Mr. Newbold,--try Bermuda, for instance. The sea air and the warmth there might set your mother up marvellously." And as the young man stared at him unresponsively he gave a grasp to the hand he held, and turning, found his way out alone. He stumbled down the dark steps of the third-rate apartment-house and into his brougham, and as the rubber tires bowed him over the asphalt he communed with himself:

"Queer about those Newbolds. Badly off, of course, to live in that

place, yet they know what it means to call me in. There must be some money. I wonder if they have enough for a trip, poor souls. Bah! they must have--everybody has when it comes to life and death. They'll get it somehow--rich relations and all that. Burr Claflin is their cousin, I know. David Newbold himself was rich enough five years ago, when he made that unlucky gamble in stocks--which killed him, they say. Well--life is certainly hard." And the doctor turned his mind to a new pair of horses he had been looking at in the afternoon, with a comfortable sense of a wind-guard or so, at the least, between himself and the gales of adversity.

In the little drawing-room, with its cheap paper and its old portraits, Randolph Newbold faced his sister with the news. He knew her courage, yet, even in the stress of his feeling, he wondered at it now; he felt almost a pang of jealousy when he saw her take the blow as he had not been able to take it.

"It is a death-sentence," he said, brokenly. "We have not the money to send her south, and we cannot get it."

Katherine Newbold's hands clenched. "We will get it," she said. "I don't know how just now, but we'll get it, Randolph. Mother's life shall not go for lack of a few hundred dollars. Oh, think--just think--six years ago it would have meant nothing. We went south every winter, and we were all well. It is too cruel! But we'll get the money--you'll see."

"How?" the young man asked, bitterly. "The last jewel went so that we could have Dr. Renfrew. There's nothing here to sell--nobody would buy our ancestors," and he looked up mournfully at the painted figures on the wall. The very thought seemed an indignity to those stately personalities--the English judge in his wig, the colonial general in his buff-faced uniform, harbored for a century proudly among their own, now speculated upon as possible revenue. The girl put up a hand toward them as if deprecating her brother's words, and his voice went on: "You know the doctor practically told me this morning. I have had no hope all day, and all day I have lived in hell. I don't know how I did my work. To-night, coming home, I walked past Litterny's. The windows were lighted and filled with a gorgeous lot of stones--there were a dozen big diamond brooches. I stopped and looked at them, and thought how she used to wear such things, and how now her life was going for the value of one of them, and--you may be horrified, Katherine, but this is true: If I could have broken into that window and snatched some of that stuff, I'd have done it. Honesty and all I've been brought up to would have meant nothing--nothing. I'd do it now, in a second, if I could, to get the money to save my mother. God! The town is swimming in money, and I can't get a little to keep her alive!"

The young man's eyes were wild with a passion of helplessness, but his sister gazed at him calmly, as if considering a question. From a room beyond came a painful cough, and the girl was on her feet.

"She is awake; I must go to her. But I shall think--don't be hopeless, boy--I shall think of a way." And she was gone.

Worn out with emotion, Randolph Newbold was sleeping a deep sleep that night. With a start he awoke, staring at a white figure with long, fair braids.

"Randolph, it's I--Katherine. Don't be startled."

"What's the matter? Is she worse?" He lifted himself anxiously, blinking sleep from his eyes.

"No--oh no! She's sleeping well. It's just that I have to talk to you, Randolph. Now. I can't wait till morning--you'll understand when I tell you. I haven't been asleep at all; I've been thinking. I know now how we can get the money."

"Katherine, are you raving?" the brother demanded; but the girl was not to be turned aside.

"Listen to me," she said, and in her tone was the authority of the stronger personality, and the young man listened. She sat on the edge of his bed and held his hand as she talked, and through their lives neither might ever forget that midnight council.

* * * * *

The room had an air of having come in perfect and luxurious condition, fur-lined and jewel-clasped, as it were, from the hands of a good decorator, and of having stopped at that. The great triple lamp glowed green as if set with gigantic emeralds; and its soft light shone on a scheme of color full of charm for the eye. The stuffs, the woodwork, were of a delightful harmony, but it seemed that the books and the pictures were chosen to match them. The man talking, in the great carved armchair by the fire, fitted the place. His vigorous, pleasant face looked prosperous, and so kindly was his air that one might not cavil at a lack of subtler qualities. He drew a long breath as he brought out the last words of the story he was telling.

"And that, Mr. North," he concluded, "is the way the firm of Litterny Brothers, the leading jewellers of this city, were done yesterday by a person or persons unknown, to the tune of five thousand dollars." His eyes turned from the blazing logs to his guest.

The young man in his clerical dress stood as he listened, with eyes wide like a child's, fixed on the speaker. He stooped and picked up a poker and pushed the logs together as he answered. The deliberateness of the action would not have prepared one for the intensity of his words. "I never wanted to be a detective before," he said, "but I'd give a good

deal to catch the man who did that. It was such planned rascality, such keen-witted scoundrelism, that it gives me a fierce desire to show him up. I'd like to teach the beggar that honesty can be as intelligent as knavery; that in spite of his strength of cunning, law and right are stronger. I wish I could catch him," and the brass poker gleamed in a savage flourish. "I'd have no mercy. The hungry wretch who steals meat, the ignorant sinner taught to sin from babyhood--I have infinite patience for such. But this thief spoke like a gentleman, and the maid said he was 'a pretty young man'--there's no excuse for him. He simply wanted money that wasn't his,--there's no excuse. It makes my blood boil to think of a clever rascal like that succeeding in his rascality." With that the intense manner had dropped from him as a garment, and he was smiling the gentlest, most whimsical smile at the older man. "You'll think, Mr. Litterny, that it's the loss of my new parish-house that's making me so ferocious, but, honestly, I'd forgotten all about it." And no one who heard him could doubt his sincerity. "I was thinking of the case from your point of view. As to the parish-house, it's a disappointment, but of course I know that a large loss like this must make a difference in a man's expenditures. You have been very good to St. John's already,--a great many times you have been good to us."

"It's a disappointment to me as well," Litterny said. "Old St. John's of Newburyport has been dear to me many years. I was confirmed and married there--but you know. Everything I could do for it has been a satisfaction. And I looked forward to giving this parish-house. In ordinary years a theft of five thousand dollars would not have prevented me, but there have been complications and large expenses of late, to which this loss is the last straw. I shall have to postpone the parish-house,--but it shall be only postponed, Mr. North, only postponed."

The young rector answered quietly: "As I said before, Mr. Litterny, you have been most generous. We are grateful more than I know how to say." His manner was very winning, and the older man's kind face brightened.

"The greatest luxury which money brings is to give it away. St. John's owes its thanks not to me, but to you, Mr. North. I have meant for some time to put into words my appreciation of your work there. In two years you have infused more life and earnestness into that sleepy parish than I thought possible. You've waked them up, put energy into them, and got it out of them. You've done wonders. It's right you should know that people think this of you, and that your work is valued."

"I am glad," Norman North said, and the restraint of the words carried more than a speech.

Mr. Litterny went on: "But there's such a thing as overdoing, young man, and you're shaving the edge of it. You're looking ill--poor color--thin as a rail. You need a rest."

"I think I'll go to Bermuda. My senior warden was there last year, and he says it's a wonderful little place--full of flowers and tennis and sailing, and blue sea and nice people." He stood up suddenly and broadened his broad shoulders. "I love the south," he said. "And I love out-of-doors and using my muscles. It's good to think of whole days with no responsibility, and with exercise till my arms and legs ache. I get little exercise, and I miss it. I was on the track team at Yale, you see, and rather strong at tennis."

Mr. Litterny smiled, and his smile was full of sympathy. "We try to make a stained-glass saint out of you," he said, "and all the time you're a human youngster with a human desire for a good time. A mere lad," he added, reflectively, and went on: "Go down to Bermuda with a light heart, my boy, and enjoy yourself,--it will do your church as much good as you. Play tennis and sail--fall in love if you find the right girl,--nothing makes a man over like that." North was putting out his hand. "And remember," Litterny added, "to keep an eye out for my thief. You're retained as assistant detective in the case."

* * * *

On a bright, windy morning a steamship wound its careful way through the twisted water-road of Hamilton Harbor, Bermuda. Up from cabins mid corners poured figures unknown to the decks during the passage, and haggard faces brightened under the balmy breeze, and tired eyes smiled at the dark hills and snowy sands of the sliding shore. In a sheltered corner of the deck a woman lay back in a chair and drew in breaths of soft air, and a tall girl watched her.

"You feel better already, don't you?" she demanded, and Mrs. Newbold put her hand into her daughter's.

"It is Paradise," she said. "I am going to get well."

In an hour the landing had been made, the custom-house passed; the gay, exhilarating little drive had been taken to the hotel, through white streets, past white-roofed houses buried in trees and flowers and vines; the sick woman lay quiet and happy on her bed, drawn to the open window, where the healing of the breeze touched her gently, and where her eyes dreamed over a fairy stretch of sea and islands. Katherine, moving about the room, unpacking, came to sit in a chair by her mother and talk to her for a moment.

"To-morrow, if you're a good child, you shall go for a drive. Think--a drive in an enchanted island. It's Shakespeare's _Tempest_ island,--did I tell you I heard that on the boat? We might run across Caliban any minute, and I think at least we'll find 'M' and 'F', for Miranda and Ferdinand, cut into the bark of a tree somewhere. We'll go for a drive every day, every single day, till we find it. You'll see."

Mrs. Newbold's eyes moved from the sea and rested, perplexed, on her daughter. "Katherine, how can we afford to drive every day? How can we be here at all? I don't understand it. I'm sure there was nothing left to sell except the land out west, and Mr. Seaton told us last spring that it was worthless. How did you and Randolph conjure up the money for this beautiful journey that is going to save my life?"

The girl bent impulsively and kissed her with tender roughness. "It is going to do that--it is!" she cried, and her voice broke. Then: "Never mind how the money came, dear,--invalids mustn't be curious. It strains their nerves. Wait till you're well and perhaps you'll hear a tale about that land out west."

Day after day slipped past in the lotus-eating land whose unreality makes it almost a change of planets from every-day America. Each day brought health with great rapidity, and soon each day brought new friends. Mrs. Newbold was full of charm, and the devotion between the ill mother and the blooming daughter was an attractive sight. Yet the girl was not light-hearted. Often the mother, waking in the night, heard a shivering sigh through the open door between their rooms; often she surprised a harassed look in the young eyes which, with all that the family had gone through, was new to them. But Katherine laughed at questions, and threw herself so gayly into the pleasures which came to her that Mrs. Newbold, too happy to be analytical, let the straws pass and the wind blow where it would.

There came a balmy morning when the two were to take, with half a dozen others, the long drive to St. George's. The three carriage-loads set off in a pleasant hubbub from the white-paved courtyard of the hotel, and as Katherine settled her mother with much care and many rugs, her camera dropped under the wheels. Everybody was busy, nobody was looking, and she stooped and reached for it in vain. Then out of a blue sky a voice said:

"I'll get it for you," She was pushed firmly aside and a figure in a blue coat was grovelling adventurously beneath the trap. It came out, straightened; she had her camera; she was staring up into a face which contemplated her, which startled her, so radiant, so everything desirable it seemed to her to be. The man's eyes considered her a moment as she thanked him, and then he had lifted his hat and was gone, running, like a boy in a hurry for a holiday, toward the white stone landing. An empty sail flopped big at the landing, and the girl stood and looked as he sprang in under it and took the rudder. Joe, the head porter, the familiar friend of every one, was stowing in a rug.

"That gen'l'man's the Reverend Norman North,--he come by the _Trinidad_ last Wednesday; he's sailin' to St. George's," Joe volunteered. "Don't look much like a reverend, do he?" And with that the carriage had started.

Seeing the sights at St. George's, they came to the small old church, on its western side a huge flight of steps, capped with a meek doorway; on its eastern end a stone tower guarding statelily a flowery graveyard. The moment the girl stepped inside, the spell of the bright peace which filled the place caught her. The Sunday decorations were still there, and hundreds of lilies bloomed from the pillars; sunshine slanted through the simple stained glass and lay in colored patches on the floor; there were square pews of a bygone day; there was a pulpit with a winding stair; there were tablets on the walls to shipwrecked sailors, to governors and officers dead here in harness. The clumsy woodwork, the cheap carpets, the modest brasses, were in perfect order; there were marks everywhere of reverent care.

"Let me stay," the girl begged. "I don't want to drive about. I want to stay in this place. I'll meet you at the hotel for lunch, if you'll leave me." And they left her.

The verger had gone, and she was quite alone. Deep in the shadow of a gallery she slid to her knees and hid her face. "O God!" she whispered,--"O God, forgive me!" And again the words seemed torn from her--"O God, forgive me!"

There were voices in the vestibule, but the girl in the stress of her prayer did not hear.

"Deal not with us according to our sins, neither reward us according to our iniquities," she prayed, the accustomed words rushing to her want, and she was suddenly aware that two people stood in the church. One of them spoke.

"Don't bother to stay with me," he said, and in the voice, it seemed, were the qualities that a man's speech should have--strength, certainty, the unteachable tone of gentle blood, and beyond these the note of personality, always indescribable, in this case carrying an appeal and an authority oddly combined. "Don't stay with me. I like to be alone here. I'm a clergyman, and I enjoy an old church like this. I'd like to be alone in it," and a bit of silver flashed.

If the tip did it or the compelling voice, the verger murmured a word about luncheon, was gone, and the girl in her dim corner saw, as the other turned, that he was the rescuer of her camera, whose name was, Joe had said and she remembered, Norman North. She was about to move, to let herself be seen, when the young man knelt suddenly in the old-fashioned front pew, as a good child might kneel who had been taught the ways of his mother church, and bent his dark head. She waited quietly while this servant spoke to his Master. There was no sound in the silent, sun-lanced church, but outside one heard as from far away the noises of the village. Katherine's eyes rested on the bowed head, and she wondered uncertainly if she should let him know of her presence, or if it might not be better to slip out unnoticed, when in a moment he

had risen and was swinging with a vigorous step up the little corkscrew stairway of the pulpit. There he stood, facing the silence, facing the flower-starred shadows, the empty spaces; facing her, but not seeing her. And the girl forgot herself and the question of her going as she saw the look in his face, the light which comes at times to those who give their lives to holiness, since the day when the people, gazing at Stephen, the martyr, "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." When his voice floated out on the dim, sunny atmosphere it rested as lightly on the silence as if the notes of an organ rolled through its own place. He spoke a prayer of a service which, to those whose babyhood has been consecrated by it, whose childhood and youth have listened to its simple and stately words, whose manhood and womanhood have been carried over many a hard place by the lift of its familiar sentences,--he spoke a prayer of that service which is less dear only, to those bred in it, than the voices of their dearest. As a priest begins to speak to his congregation he began, and the hearer in the shadow of the gallery listened, awed:

"The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him."

And in the little church was silence as if all the earth obeyed. The collect for the day came next, and a bit of jubilant Easter service, and then his mind seemed to drift back to the sentences with which the prayer-book opens.

"This is the day which the Lord hath made," the ringing voice announced. "Let us rejoice and be glad in it." And then, stabbing into the girl's fevered conscience, "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." It was as if an inflexible judge spoke the words for her. "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive," the pure, stern tones went on.

She was not turning away from wickedness; she did not mean to turn away; she would not do that which was lawful. The girl shivered. She could not hear this dreadful accusation from the very pulpit. She must leave this place. And with that the man, as if in a sudden passion of feeling, had tossed his right hand high above him; his head was thrown back; his eyes shone up into the shadows of the roof as if they would pierce material things and see Him who reigned; he was pleading as if for his life, pleading for his brothers, for human beings who sin and suffer.

"O Lord," he prayed, "spare all those who confess their sins unto Thee, that they whose consciences by sin are accused, by Thy merciful pardon may be absolved; through Christ our Lord." And suddenly he was using the very words which had come to her of themselves a few minutes before. "Deal not with us according to our sins--deal not with us," he repeated, as if wresting forgiveness for his fellows from the Almighty. "Deal not with us according to our sins, neither reward us according to our

iniquities." And while the echo of the words yet held the girl motionless he was gone.

* * * * *

Down by the road which runs past the hotel, sunken ten feet below its level, are the tennis-courts, and soldiers in scarlet and khaki, and blue-jackets with floating ribbons, and negro bell-boys returning from errands, and white-gowned American women with flowery hats, and men in summer flannels stop as they pass, and sit on the low wall and watch the games. There is always a gallery for the tennis-players. But on a Tuesday morning about eleven o'clock the audience began to melt away in disgust. Without doubt they were having plenty of amusement among themselves, these tennis-players grouped at one side of the court and filling the air with explosions of laughter. But the amusement of the public was being neglected. Why in the world, being rubber-shod as to the foot and racquetted as to the hand, did they not play tennis? A girl in a short white dress, wearing white tennis-shoes and carrying a racquet, came tripping down the flight of stone steps, and stopped as she stood on the last landing and seemed to ask the same question. She came slowly across the empty court, looking with curiosity at the bunch of absorbed people, and presently she caught her breath. The man who was the centre of the group, who was making, apparently, the amusement, was the young clergyman, Norman North.

There was an outburst, a chorus of: "You can't have that one, Mr. North!" "That's been used!" "That's Mr. Dennison's!"

A tall English officer--a fine, manly mixture of big muscles and fresh color and khaki--looked up, saw the girl, and swung toward her. "Good morning, Miss Newbold. Come and join the fun. Devil of a fellow, that North,--they say he's a parson."

"What is it? What are they laughing at?" Katherine demanded.

"They're doing a Limerick tournament, which is what North calls the game. Mr. Gale is timekeeper. They're to see which recites most rhymes inside five minutes. The winner picks his court and plays with Miss Lee."

Captain Comerford imparted this in jerky whispers, listening with one ear all the time to a sound which stirred Katherine, the voice which she had heard yesterday in the church at St. George's. The Englishman's spasmodic growl stopped, and she drifted a step nearer, listening. As she caught the words, her brows drew together with displeasure, with shocked surprise. The inspired saint of yesterday was reciting with earnestness, with every delicate inflection of his beautiful voice, these words:

"There was a young curate of Kidderminster,

Who kindly, but firmly, chid a spinster,
Because on the ice
She said something not nice
When he quite inadvertently slid ag'inst her."

As the roar which followed this subsided, Katherine's face cleared. What right had she to make a pattern of solemn righteousness for this stranger and be insulted if he did not fit? Certainly he was saintly--she had seen his soul bared to her vision; but certainly he was human also, as this moment was demonstrating. It flashed over her vaguely to wonder which was the dominant quality--which would rule in a stress of temptation--the saintly side or the human? But at least he was human with a winning humanity. His mirth and his enjoyment of it were as spontaneous as a mischievous, bright child's, and it was easy to see that the charm of his remarkable voice attracted others as it had attracted her.

"There was a young fellow from Clyde,
Who was often at funerals espied--"

he had begun, and with that, between her first shock and her swift recovery, with the contrast between the man of yesterday and the man of to-day, Katherine suddenly laughed aloud. North stopped short, and turned and looked at her, and for a second their eyes met, and each read recognition and friendliness. The Limerick went on:

"When asked who was dead,
He nodded and said,
'_I_ don't know--_I_ just came for the ride."

"Eleven for Mr. North--one-half minute more," called Mr. Gale, and instantly North was in the breach:

"A sore-hipped hippopotamus quite flustered
Objected to a poultice made of custard;
'Can't you doctor up my hip
With anything but flip?'
So they put upon the hip a pot o' mustard."

And the half-minute was done and North had won, and there was clapping of hands for the victor, and at once, before the little uproar was over, Katherine saw him speak a word to Mr. Gale, and saw the latter, turning, stare about as if searching for some one, and, meeting her glance, smile.

"I want to present Mr. North, Miss Newbold," Gale said.

"Why did you laugh in the middle of my Limerick? Had you heard it?" North demanded, as if they had known each other a year instead of a minute.

"No, I had not heard it." Katherine shook her head.

"Then why did you laugh?"

She looked at him reflectively. "I don't know you well enough to tell you that."

"How soon will you know me well enough--if I do my best?"

She considered. "About three weeks from yesterday."

* * * *

Many things grow fast in southern climates--fruits, flowers, even friendship and love. Three weeks later, on a hot, bright morning of April, North and Katherine Newbold were walking down a road of Bermuda to the sea, and between them was what had ripened in the twenty-one days from a germ to a full-grown bud, ready to open at the lightest touch into flower. As they walked down such a road of a dream, the man talked to the girl as he had never talked to any one before. He spoke of his work and its hopes and disappointments, of the pathos, the tragedy, the comedy often of a way of life which leads by a deeper cut through men's hearts than any other, and he told her also, modestly indeed, and because he loved to tell her what meant much to him, of the joy of knowing himself successful in his parish. He went into details, absorbingly interesting to him, and this new luxury of speaking freely carried him away.

"I hope I'm not boring you." His frank gaze turned on her anxiously. "I don't know what right I have to assume that the increase in the Sunday-school, or even the new brass pulpit, is a fascinating subject to you. I never did this before," he said, and there was something in his voice which hindered the girl from answering his glance. But there was no air of being bored about her, and he went on. "However, life isn't all good luck. I had a serious blow just before I came down here--a queer thing happened. I told you just now that all the large gifts to St. John's had come from one man--a former parishioner. The man was James Litterny, of the great firm of--Why, what's the matter--what is it?" For Katherine had stopped short, in her fast, swinging walk, and without a sound had swayed and caught at the wall as if to keep herself from falling. Before he could reach her she had straightened herself and was smiling.

"I felt ill for a second--it's nothing,--let's go along."

North made eager suggestions for her comfort, but the girl was firm in her assertion, that she was now quite well, so that, having no sisters and being ignorant that a healthy young woman does not, any more than a healthy young man, go white and stagger without reason, he yielded, and

they walked briskly on.

"You were telling me something that happened to you--something connected with Mr.--with the rich parishioner." Her tone was steady and casual, but looking at her, he saw that she was still pale.

"Do you really want to hear my yarns? You're sure it isn't that which made you feel faint--because I talked so much?"

"It's always an effort not to talk myself," she laughed up at him, yet with a strange look in her eyes. "All the same, talk a little more. Tell me what you began to tell about Mr. Litterny." The name came out full and strong.

"Oh, that! Well, it's a story extraordinary enough for a book. I think it will interest you."

"I think it will," Katherine agreed.

"You see," he went on, "Mr. Litterny promised us a new parish-house, the best and largest practicable. It was to cost, with the lot, ten thousand dollars. It was to be begun this spring. Not long before I came to Bermuda, I had a note one morning from him, asking me to come to his house the next evening. I went, and he told me that the parish-house would have to be given up for the present, because the firm of Litterny Brothers had just met with a loss, through a most skilful and original robbery, of five thousand dollars."

"A robbery?" the girl repeated. "Burglars, you mean?"

"Something much more artistic than burglars. I told you this story was good enough for a book. It's been kept quiet because the detectives thought the chance better that way of hunting the thief to earth." (Why should she catch her breath?) "But I'm under no promise--I'm sure I may tell you. You're not likely to have any connection with the rascal."

Katherine's step hung a little as if she shrank from the words, but she caught at a part of the sentence and repeated it, "'Hunting the thief to earth'--you say that as if you'd like to see it done."

"I would like to see it done," said North, with slow emphasis. "Nothing has ever more roused my resentment. I suppose it's partly the loss of the parish-house, but, aside from that, it makes me rage to think of splendid old James Litterny, the biggest-hearted man I know, being done in that way. Why, he'd have helped the scoundrel in a minute if he'd gone to him instead of stealing from him. Usually my sympathies are with the sinner, but I believe if I caught this one I'd be merciless."

"Would you mind sitting down here?" Katherine asked, in a voice which sounded hard. "I'm not ill, but I feel--tired. I want to sit here and

listen to the story of that unprincipled thief and his wicked robbery."

North was all solicitude in a moment, but the girl put him aside impatiently.

"I'm quite right. Don't bother. I just want to be still while you talk. See what a good seat this is."

Over the russet sand of the dunes the sea flashed a burning blue; storm-twisted cedars led a rutted road down to it; in the salt air the piny odor was sharp with sunlight. Katherine had dropped beneath one of the dwarfed trees, and leaning back, smiled dimly up at him with a stricken face which North did not understand.

"You are ill," he said, anxiously. "You look ill. Please let me take care of you. There is a house back there--let me--" but she interrupted:

"I'm not ill, and I won't be fussed over. I'm not exactly right, but I will be in a few minutes. The best thing for me is just to rest here and have you talk to me. Tell me that story you are so slow about."

He took her at her word. Lying at full length at her feet--his head propped on a hillock so that he might look into her face, one of his hands against the hem of her white dress,--the shadows of the cedars swept back and forth across him, the south sea glittered beyond the sand-dunes, and he told the story.

"Mr. Litterny was in his office in the early afternoon of February 18," he began, "when a man called him up on the telephone. Mr. Litterny did not recognize the voice, but the man stated at once that he was Burr Claflin, whose name you may know. He is a rich broker, and a personal friend of both the Litternys. Voice is so uncertain a quantity over a telephone that it did not occur to Mr. Litterny to be suspicious on that point, and the conversation was absolutely in character otherwise. The talker used expressions and a manner of saying things which the jeweller knew to be characteristic of Claflin.

"He told Mr. Litterny that he had just made a lucky hit in stocks, and 'turned over a bunch of money,' as he put it, and that he wanted to make his wife a present. 'Now--this afternoon--this minute,' he said, which was just like Burr Claflin, who is an impetuous old chap. 'I want to give her a diamond brooch, and I want her to wear it out to dinner to-night,' he said. 'Can't you send two or three corks up to the house for me?' That surprised Mr. Litterny and he hesitated, but finally said that he would do it. It was against the rules of the house, but as it was for Mr. Claflin he would do it. They had a little talk about the details, and Claflin arranged to call up his wife and tell her that the jewels would be there at four-thirty, so that she could look out for them personally. All that was the Litterny end of the affair. Simple enough, wasn't it?"

Katherine's eyes were so intent, so brilliant, that Norman North went on with a pleased sense that he told the tale well:

"Now begins the Claflin experience. At half past four a clerk from Litterny's left a package at the Claflin house in Cleveland Avenue, which was at once taken, as the man desired, to Mrs. Claflin. She opened it and found three very handsome diamond brooches, which astonished her extremely, as she knew nothing about them. However, it was not unusual for Claflin to give her jewelry, and he is, as I said, an impulsive man, so that unexpected presents had come once or twice before; and altogether, being much taken with the stones, she concluded simply that she would understand when her husband came home to dinner.

"However, her hopes were dashed, for twenty minutes later, barely long enough for the clerk to have got back to the shop, she was called to the telephone by a message, said to be from Litterny's, and a most polite and apologetic person explained over the line that a mistake had been made; that the diamonds had been addressed and sent to her by an error of the shipping-clerk; that they were not intended for Mrs. Burr Claflin, but for Mrs. Bird Catlin, and that the change in name had been discovered on the messenger's return. Would Mrs. Claflin pardon the trouble caused, and would she be good enough to see that the package was given to their man, who would call for it in fifteen minutes? Now the Catlins, as you must know, are richer people even than the Claflins, so that the thing was absolutely plausible. Mrs. Claflin tied up the jewels herself, and entrusted them to her own maid, who has been with her for years, and this woman answered the door and gave the parcel into the hands of a man who said that he was sent from Litterny's for it. All that the maid could say of him was that he was 'a pretty young man, with a speech like a gentleman.' And that was the last that has been seen of the diamond brooches. Wasn't it simple? Didn't I tell you that this affair was an artistic one?" North demanded.

Katherine Newbold drew a deep breath, and the story-teller, watching her face, saw that she was stirred with an emotion which he put down, with a slight surprise, to interest in his narrative.

"Is there no clew to the--thief? Have they no idea at all? Haven't those wonderful detectives yet got on--his track?"

North shook his head. "I had a letter by yesterday's boat from Mr. Litterny about another matter, and he spoke of this. He said the police were baffled--that he believed now that it could never be traced."

"Thank God!" Katherine said, slowly and distinctly, and North stared in astonishment.

"What?" His tone was incredulous.

"Oh; don't take me so seriously," said the girl, impatiently. "It's only that I can't sympathize with your multimillionaire, who loses a little of his heaps of money, against some poor soul to whom that little may mean life or death--life or death, maybe, for his nearest and dearest. Mr. Litterny has had a small loss, which he won't feel in a year from now. The thief, the rascal, the scoundrel, as you call him so fluently, has escaped for now, perhaps, with his ill-gotten gains, but he is a hunted thing, living with a black terror of being found out--a terror which clutches him when he prays and when he dances. It's the thief I'm sorry for--I'm sorry for him--I'm sorry for him." Her voice was agitated and uneven beyond what seemed reasonable.

"The way of the transgressor is hard," Norman North said, slowly, and looked across the shifting sand-stretch to the inevitable sea, and spoke the words pitilessly, as if an inevitable law spoke through him.

They cut into the girl's soul. A quick gasp of pain broke from her, and the man turned and saw her face and sprang to his feet.

"Come," he said,--"come home," and held out his hands.

She let him take hers, and he lifted her lightly, and did not let her hands go. For a second they stood, and into the silence a deep boom of the water against the beach thundered and died away. He drew the hands slowly toward him till he held them against him. There seemed not to be any need for words.

Half an hour later, as they walked back through the sweet loneliness of Springfield Avenue, North said: "You've forgotten something. You've forgotten that this is the day you were to tell me why you had the bad manners to laugh at me before you knew me. Now that we are engaged it's your duty to tell me if I'm ridiculous."

There was none of the responsive, soft laughter he expected. "We're not engaged--we can't be engaged," she threw back, impetuously, and as he looked at her there was suffering in her face.

"What do you mean? You told me you loved me." His voice was full of its curious mixture of gentleness and sternness, and she shrank visibly from the sternness.

"Don't be hard on me," she begged, like a frightened child, and he caught her hand with a quick exclamation. "I'll tell you--everything. Not only that little thing about my laughing, but--but more--everything. Why I cannot be engaged to you. I must tell you--I know it--but, oh! not to-day--not for a little while! Let me have this little time to be happy. You sail a week from to-day. I'll write it all for you, and you can read it on the way to New York. That will do--won't that do?" she pleaded.

North took both her hands in a hard grasp and searched her face and her eyes--eyes clear and sweet, though filled with misery. "Yes, that will do," he said. "It's all nonsense that you can't be engaged to me. You are engaged to me, and you are going to marry me. If you love me--and you say you do,--there's nothing I'll let interfere. Nothing--absolutely nothing." There was little of the saint in his look now; it was filled with human love and masterful determination, and in his eyes smouldered a recklessness, a will to have his way, that was no angel, but all man.

A week later Norman North sailed to New York, and in his pocket was a letter which was not to be read till Bermuda was out of sight. When the coral reef was passed, when the fairy blue of the island waters had changed to the dark swell of the Atlantic, he slipped the bolt in the door of his cabin and took out the letter.

"I laughed because you were so wonderfully two men in one," it began, "I was in the church at St. George's the day when you sent the verger away and went into the pulpit and said parts of the service. I could not tell you this before because it came so close to the other thing which I must tell you now; because I sat trembling before you that day, hidden in the shadow of a gallery, knowing myself a criminal, while you stood above me like a pitiless judge and rolled out sentences that were bolts of fire emptied on my soul. The next morning I heard you reciting Limericks. Are you surprised that I laughed when the contrast struck me? Even then I wondered which was the real of you, the saint or the man,--which would win if it came to a desperate fight. The fight is coming, Norman.

"That's all a preamble. Here is what you must know: I am the thief who stole Mr. Litterny's diamonds."

The letter fell, and the man caught at it as it fell. His hand shook, but he laughed aloud.

"It is a joke," he said, in a queer, dry voice. "A wretched joke. How can she?" And he read on:

"You won't believe this at first; you will think I am making a poor joke; but you will have to believe it in the end. I will try to put the case before you as an outside person would put it, without softening or condoning. My mother was very ill; the specialist, to pay whom we had sold her last jewel, said that she would die if she were not taken south; we had no money to take her south. That night my brother lost his self-control and raved about breaking into a shop and stealing diamonds, to get money to save her life. That put the thought into my mind, and I made a plan. Randolph, my brother, is a clever amateur actor, and the rich Burr Claflin is our distant cousin. We both know him fairly well, and it was easy enough for Randolph to copy his mannerisms. We knew also, of course, more or less, his way of living, and that it would not be out of drawing that he should send up diamonds to his wife unexpectedly. I planned it all, and I made Randolph do it. I have always

been able to influence him to what I pleased. The sin is all mine, not his. We had been selling my mother's jewels little by little for several years, so we had no difficulty in getting rid of the stones, which Randolph took from their settings and sold to different dealers. My mother knows nothing of where the money came from. We are living in Bermuda now, in comfort and luxury, I as well as she, on the profits of my thievery. I am not sorry. It has wrecked life, perhaps eternity, for me, but I would do it again to save my mother.

"I put this confession into your hands to do with, as far as I am concerned, what you like. If the saint in you believes that I ought to be sent to jail, take this to Mr. Litterny and have him send me to jail. But you shan't touch Randolph--you are not free there. It was I who did it--he was my tool,--any one will tell you I have the stronger will. You shall not hurt Randolph--that is barred.

"You see now why I couldn't be engaged to you--you wouldn't want to marry a thief, would you, Norman? I can never make restitution, you know, for the money will be mostly gone before we get home, and there is no more to come. You could not, either, for you said that you had little beyond your salary. We could never make it good to Mr. Litterny, even if you wanted to marry me after this. Mr. Litterny is your best friend; you are bound to him by a thousand ties of gratitude and affection. You can't marry a thief who has robbed him of five thousand dollars, and never tell him, and go on taking his gifts. That is the way the saint will look at it--the saint who thundered awful warnings at me in the little church at St. George's. But even that day there was something gentler than the dreadful holiness of you. Do you remember how you pleaded, begged as if of your father, for your brothers and sisters? 'Deal not with us according to our sins, neither reward us according to our iniquities,' you said. Do you remember? As you said that to God, I say it to you, I love you. I leave my fate at your mercy. But don't forget that you yourself begged that, with your hands stretched out to heaven, as I stretch my hands to you, Norman, Norman--'Deal not with me according to my sins, neither reward me according to my iniquities.'"

The noises of a ship moving across a quiet ocean went on steadily. Many feet tramped back and forth on the deck, and cheerful voices and laughter floated through the skylight, and down below a man knelt in a narrow cabin with his head buried in his arms, motionless.



THE SCULPTOR'S FUNERAL

from Project Gutenberg's **The Troll Garden and Selected Stories**, by Willa Cather

A group of the townspeople stood on the station siding of a little Kansas town, awaiting the coming of the night train, which was already twenty minutes overdue. The snow had fallen thick over everything; in the pale starlight the line of bluffs across the wide, white meadows south of the town made soft, smoke-colored curves against the clear sky. The men on the siding stood first on one foot and then on the other, their hands thrust deep into their trousers pockets, their overcoats open, their shoulders screwed up with the cold; and they glanced from time to time toward the southeast, where the railroad track wound along the river shore. They conversed in low tones and moved about restlessly, seeming uncertain as to what was expected of them. There was but one of the company who looked as though he knew exactly why he was there; and he kept conspicuously apart; walking to the far end of the platform, returning to the station door, then pacing up the track again, his chin sunk in the high collar of his overcoat, his burly shoulders drooping forward, his gait heavy and dogged. Presently he was approached by a tall, spare, grizzled man clad in a faded Grand Army suit, who shuffled out from the group and advanced with a certain deference, craning his neck forward until his back made the angle of a jackknife three-quarters open.

"I reckon she's agoin' to be pretty late ag'in tonight, Jim," he remarked in a squeaky falsetto. "S'pose it's the snow?"

"I don't know," responded the other man with a shade of annoyance, speaking from out an astonishing cataract of red beard that grew fiercely and thickly in all directions.

The spare man shifted the quill toothpick he was chewing to the other side of his mouth. "It ain't likely that anybody from the East will come with the corpse, I s'pose," he went on reflectively.

"I don't know," responded the other, more curtly than before.

"It's too bad he didn't belong to some lodge or other. I like an order funeral myself. They seem more appropriate for people of some reputation," the spare man continued, with an ingratiating concession in his shrill voice, as he carefully placed his toothpick in his vest pocket. He always carried the flag at the G. A. R. funerals in the town.

The heavy man turned on his heel, without replying, and walked up the siding. The spare man shuffled back to the uneasy group. "Jim's ez full ez a tick, ez ushel," he commented commiseratingly.

Just then a distant whistle sounded, and there was a shuffling of feet

on the platform. A number of lanky boys of all ages appeared as suddenly and slimily as eels wakened by the crack of thunder; some came from the waiting room, where they had been warming themselves by the red stove, or half-asleep on the slat benches; others uncoiled themselves from baggage trucks or slid out of express wagons. Two clambered down from the driver's seat of a hearse that stood backed up against the siding. They straightened their stooping shoulders and lifted their heads, and a flash of momentary animation kindled their dull eyes at that cold, vibrant scream, the world-wide call for men. It stirred them like the note of a trumpet; just as it had often stirred the man who was coming home tonight, in his boyhood.

The night express shot, red as a rocket, from out the eastward marsh lands and wound along the river shore under the long lines of shivering poplars that sentineled the meadows, the escaping steam hanging in gray masses against the pale sky and blotting out the Milky Way. In a moment the red glare from the headlight streamed up the snow-covered track before the siding and glittered on the wet, black rails. The burly man with the disheveled red beard walked swiftly up the platform toward the approaching train, uncovering his head as he went. The group of men behind him hesitated, glanced questioningly at one another, and awkwardly followed his example. The train stopped, and the crowd shuffled up to the express car just as the door was thrown open, the spare man in the G. A. B. suit thrusting his head forward with curiosity. The express messenger appeared in the doorway, accompanied by a young man in a long ulster and traveling cap.

"Are Mr. Merrick's friends here?" inquired the young man.

The group on the platform swayed and shuffled uneasily. Philip Phelps, the banker, responded with dignity: "We have come to take charge of the body. Mr. Merrick's father is very feeble and can't be about."

"Send the agent out here," growled the express messenger, "and tell the operator to lend a hand."

The coffin was got out of its rough box and down on the snowy platform. The townspeople drew back enough to make room for it and then formed a close semicircle about it, looking curiously at the palm leaf which lay across the black cover. No one said anything. The baggage man stood by his truck, waiting to get at the trunks. The engine panted heavily, and the fireman dodged in and out among the wheels with his yellow torch and long oilcan, snapping the spindle boxes. The young Bostonian, one of the dead sculptor's pupils who had come with the body, looked about him helplessly. He turned to the banker, the only one of that black, uneasy, stoop-shouldered group who seemed enough of an individual to be addressed.

"None of Mr. Merrick's brothers are here?" he asked uncertainly.

The man with the red beard for the first time stepped up and joined the group. "No, they have not come yet; the family is scattered. The body will be taken directly to the house." He stooped and took hold of one of the handles of the coffin.

"Take the long hill road up, Thompson--it will be easier on the horses," called the liveryman as the undertaker snapped the door of the hearse and prepared to mount to the driver's seat.

Laird, the red-bearded lawyer, turned again to the stranger: "We didn't know whether there would be anyone with him or not," he explained. "It's a long walk, so you'd better go up in the hack." He pointed to a single, battered conveyance, but the young man replied stiffly: "Thank you, but I think I will go up with the hearse. If you don't object," turning to the undertaker, "I'll ride with you."

They clambered up over the wheels and drove off in the starlight tip the long, white hill toward the town. The lamps in the still village were shining from under the low, snow-burdened roofs; and beyond, on every side, the plains reached out into emptiness, peaceful and wide as the soft sky itself, and wrapped in a tangible, white silence.

When the hearse backed up to a wooden sidewalk before a naked, weatherbeaten frame house, the same composite, ill-defined group that had stood upon the station siding was huddled about the gate. The front yard was an icy swamp, and a couple of warped planks, extending from the sidewalk to the door, made a sort of rickety footbridge. The gate hung on one hinge and was opened wide with difficulty. Steavens, the young stranger, noticed that something black was tied to the knob of the front door.

The grating sound made by the casket, as it was drawn from the hearse, was answered by a scream from the house; the front door was wrenched open, and a tall, corpulent woman rushed out bareheaded into the snow and flung herself upon the coffin, shrieking: "My boy, my boy! And this is how you've come home to me!"

As Steavens turned away and closed his eyes with a shudder of unutterable repulsion, another woman, also tall, but flat and angular, dressed entirely in black, darted out of the house and caught Mrs. Merrick by the shoulders, crying sharply: "Come, come, Mother; you mustn't go on like this!" Her tone changed to one of obsequious solemnity as she turned to the banker: "The parlor is ready, Mr. Phelps."

The bearers carried the coffin along the narrow boards, while the undertaker ran ahead with the coffin-rests. They bore it into a large, unheated room that smelled of dampness and disuse and furniture polish, and set it down under a hanging lamp ornamented with jingling glass prisms and before a "Rogers group" of John Alden and Priscilla,

wreathed with smilax. Henry Steavens stared about him with the sickening conviction that there had been some horrible mistake, and that he had somehow arrived at the wrong destination. He looked painfully about over the clover-green Brussels, the fat plush upholstery, among the hand-painted china plaques and panels, and vases, for some mark of identification, for something that might once conceivably have belonged to Harvey Merrick. It was not until he recognized his friend in the crayon portrait of a little boy in kilts and curls hanging above the piano that he felt willing to let any of these people approach the coffin.

"Take the lid off, Mr. Thompson; let me see my boy's face," wailed the elder woman between her sobs. This time Steavens looked fearfully, almost beseechingly into her face, red and swollen under its masses of strong, black, shiny hair. He flushed, dropped his eyes, and then, almost incredulously, looked again. There was a kind of power about her face--a kind of brutal handsomeness, even, but it was scarred and furrowed by violence, and so colored and coarsened by fiercer passions that grief seemed never to have laid a gentle finger there. The long nose was distended and knobbed at the end, and there were deep lines on either side of it; her heavy, black brows almost met across her forehead; her teeth were large and square and set far apart--teeth that could tear. She filled the room; the men were obliterated, seemed tossed about like twigs in an angry water, and even Steavens felt himself being drawn into the whirlpool.

The daughter--the tall, rawboned woman in crepe, with a mourning comb in her hair which curiously lengthened her long face sat stiffly upon the sofa, her hands, conspicuous for their large knuckles, folded in her lap, her mouth and eyes drawn down, solemnly awaiting the opening of the coffin. Near the door stood a mulatto woman, evidently a servant in the house, with a timid bearing and an emaciated face pitifully sad and gentle. She was weeping silently, the corner of her calico apron lifted to her eyes, occasionally suppressing a long, quivering sob. Steavens walked over and stood beside her.

Feeble steps were heard on the stairs, and an old man, tall and frail, odorous of pipe smoke, with shaggy, unkept gray hair and a dingy beard, tobacco stained about the mouth, entered uncertainly. He went slowly up to the coffin and stood, rolling a blue cotton handkerchief between his hands, seeming so pained and embarrassed by his wife's orgy of grief that he had no consciousness of anything else.

"There, there, Annie, dear, don't take on so," he quavered timidly, putting out a shaking hand and awkwardly patting her elbow. She turned with a cry and sank upon his shoulder with such violence that he tottered a little. He did not even glance toward the coffin, but continued to look at her with a dull, frightened, appealing expression, as a spaniel looks at the whip. His sunken cheeks slowly reddened and burned with miserable shame. When his wife rushed from the room her

daughter strode after her with set lips. The servant stole up to the coffin, bent over it for a moment, and then slipped away to the kitchen, leaving Steavens, the lawyer, and the father to themselves. The old man stood trembling and looking down at his dead son's face. The sculptor's splendid head seemed even more noble in its rigid stillness than in life. The dark hair had crept down upon the wide forehead; the face seemed strangely long, but in it there was not that beautiful and chaste repose which we expect to find in the faces of the dead. The brows were so drawn that there were two deep lines above the beaked nose, and the chin was thrust forward defiantly. It was as though the strain of life had been so sharp and bitter that death could not at once wholly relax the tension and smooth the countenance into perfect peace--as though he were still guarding something precious and holy, which might even yet be wrested from him.

The old man's lips were working under his stained beard. He turned to the lawyer with timid deference: "Phelps and the rest are comin' back to set up with Harve, ain't they?" he asked. "Thank 'ee, Jim, thank 'ee." He brushed the hair back gently from his son's forehead. "He was a good boy, Jim; always a good boy. He was ez gentle ez a child and the kindest of 'em all--only we didn't none of us ever onderstand him." The tears trickled slowly down his beard and dropped upon the sculptor's coat.

"Martin, Martin. Oh, Martin! come here," his wife wailed from the top of the stairs. The old man started timorously: "Yes, Annie, I'm coming." He turned away, hesitated stood for a moment in miserable indecision; then he reached back and patted the dead man's hair softly, and stumbled from the room.

"Poor old man, I didn't think he had any tears left. Seems as if his eyes would have gone dry long ago. At his age nothing cuts very deep," remarked the lawyer.

Something in his tone made Steavens glance up. While the mother had been in the room the young man had scarcely seen anyone else; but now, from the moment he first glanced into Jim Laird's florid face and bloodshot eyes, he knew that he had found what he had been heartsick at not finding before--the feeling, the understanding, that must exist in someone, even here.

The man was red as his beard, with features swollen and blurred by dissipation, and a hot, blazing blue eye. His face was strained--that of a man who is controlling himself with difficulty--and he kept plucking at his beard with a sort of fierce resentment. Steavens, sitting by the window, watched him turn down the glaring lamp, still its jangling pendants with an angry gesture, and then stand with his hands locked behind him, staring down into the master's face. He could not help wondering what link there could have been between the porcelain vessel and so sooty a lump of potter's clay.

From the kitchen an uproar was sounding; when the dining-room door opened the import of it was clear. The mother was abusing the maid for having forgotten to make the dressing for the chicken salad which had been prepared for the watchers. Steavens had never heard anything in the least like it; it was injured, emotional, dramatic abuse, unique and masterly in its excruciating cruelty, as violent and unrestrained as had been her grief of twenty minutes before. With a shudder of disgust the lawyer went into the dining room and closed the door into the kitchen.

"Poor Roxy's getting it now," he remarked when he came back. "The Merricks took her out of the poorhouse years ago; and if her loyalty would let her, I guess the poor old thing could tell tales that would curdle your blood. She's the mulatto woman who was standing in here a while ago, with her apron to her eyes. The old woman is a fury; there never was anybody like her for demonstrative piety and ingenious cruelty. She made Harvey's life a hell for him when he lived at home; he was so sick ashamed of it. I never could see how he kept himself so sweet."

"He was wonderful," said Steavens slowly, "wonderful; but until tonight I have never known how wonderful."

"That is the true and eternal wonder of it, anyway; that it can come even from such a dung heap as this," the lawyer cried, with a sweeping gesture which seemed to indicate much more than the four walls within which they stood.

"I think I'll see whether I can get a little air. The room is so close I am beginning to feel rather faint," murmured Steavens, struggling with one of the windows. The sash was stuck, however, and would not yield, so he sat down dejectedly and began pulling at his collar. The lawyer came over, loosened the sash with one blow of his red fist, and sent the window up a few inches. Steavens thanked him, but the nausea which had been gradually climbing into his throat for the last half-hour left him with but one desire--a desperate feeling that he must get away from this place with what was left of Harvey Merrick. Oh, he comprehended well enough now the quiet bitterness of the smile that he had seen so often on his master's lips!

He remembered that once, when Merrick returned from a visit home, he brought with him a singularly feeling and suggestive bas-relief of a thin, faded old woman, sitting and sewing something pinned to her knee; while a full-lipped, full-blooded little urchin, his trousers held up by a single gallows, stood beside her, impatiently twitching her gown to call her attention to a butterfly he had caught. Steavens, impressed by the tender and delicate modeling of the thin, tired face, had asked him if it were his mother. He remembered the dull flush that had burned up in the sculptor's face.

The lawyer was sitting in a rocking chair beside the coffin, his head

thrown back and his eyes closed. Steavens looked at him earnestly, puzzled at the line of the chin, and wondering why a man should conceal a feature of such distinction under that disfiguring shock of beard. Suddenly, as though he felt the young sculptor's keen glance, he opened his eyes.

"Was he always a good deal of an oyster?" he asked abruptly. "He was terribly shy as a boy."

"Yes, he was an oyster, since you put it so," rejoined Steavens. "Although he could be very fond of people, he always gave one the impression of being detached. He disliked violent emotion; he was reflective, and rather distrustful of himself--except, of course, as regarded his work. He was surefooted enough there. He distrusted men pretty thoroughly and women even more, yet somehow without believing ill of them. He was determined, indeed, to believe the best, but he seemed afraid to investigate."

"A burnt dog dreads the fire," said the lawyer grimly, and closed his eyes.

Steavens went on and on, reconstructing that whole miserable boyhood. All this raw, biting ugliness had been the portion of the man whose tastes were refined beyond the limits of the reasonable--whose mind was an exhaustless gallery of beautiful impressions, and so sensitive that the mere shadow of a poplar leaf flickering against a sunny wall would be etched and held there forever. Surely, if ever a man had the magic word in his fingertips, it was Merrick. Whatever he touched, he revealed its holiest secret; liberated it from enchantment and restored it to its pristine loveliness, like the Arabian prince who fought the enchantress spell for spell. Upon whatever he had come in contact with, he had left a beautiful record of the experience--a sort of ethereal signature; a scent, a sound, a color that was his own.

Steavens understood now the real tragedy of his master's life; neither love nor wine, as many had conjectured, but a blow which had fallen earlier and cut deeper than these could have done--a shame not his, and yet so unescapably his, to bide in his heart from his very boyhood. And without--the frontier warfare; the yearning of a boy, cast ashore upon a desert of newness and ugliness and sordidness, for all that is chastened and old, and noble with traditions.

At eleven o'clock the tall, flat woman in black crepe entered, announced that the watchers were arriving, and asked them "to step into the dining room." As Steavens rose the lawyer said dryly: "You go on--it'll be a good experience for you, doubtless; as for me, I'm not equal to that crowd tonight; I've had twenty years of them."

As Steavens closed the door after him he glanced back at the lawyer, sitting by the coffin in the dim light, with his chin resting on his

hand.

The same misty group that had stood before the door of the express car shuffled into the dining room. In the light of the kerosene lamp they separated and became individuals. The minister, a pale, feeble-looking man with white hair and blond chin-whiskers, took his seat beside a small side table and placed his Bible upon it. The Grand Army man sat down behind the stove and tilted his chair back comfortably against the wall, fishing his quill toothpick from his waistcoat pocket. The two bankers, Phelps and Elder, sat off in a corner behind the dinner table, where they could finish their discussion of the new usury law and its effect on chattel security loans. The real estate agent, an old man with a smiling, hypocritical face, soon joined them. The coal-and-lumber dealer and the cattle shipper sat on opposite sides of the hard coal-burner, their feet on the nickelwork. Steavens took a book from his pocket and began to read. The talk around him ranged through various topics of local interest while the house was quieting down. When it was clear that the members of the family were in bed the Grand Army man hitched his shoulders and, untangling his long legs, caught his heels on the rounds of his chair.

"S'pose there'll be a will, Phelps?" he queried in his weak falsetto.

The banker laughed disagreeably and began trimming his nails with a pearl-handled pocketknife.

"There'll scarcely be any need for one, will there?" he queried in his turn.

The restless Grand Army man shifted his position again, getting his knees still nearer his chin. "Why, the ole man says Harve's done right well lately," he chirped.

The other banker spoke up. "I reckon he means by that Harve ain't asked him to mortgage any more farms lately, so as he could go on with his education."

"Seems like my mind don't reach back to a time when Harve wasn't bein' edycated," tittered the Grand Army man.

There was a general chuckle. The minister took out his handkerchief and blew his nose sonorously. Banker Phelps closed his knife with a snap. "It's too bad the old man's sons didn't turn out better," he remarked with reflective authority. "They never hung together. He spent money enough on Harve to stock a dozen cattle farms and he might as well have poured it into Sand Creek. If Harve had stayed at home and helped nurse what little they had, and gone into stock on the old man's bottom farm, they might all have been well fixed. But the old man had to trust everything to tenants and was cheated right and left."

"Harve never could have handled stock none," interposed the cattleman. "He hadn't it in him to be sharp. Do you remember when he bought Sander's mules for eight-year-olds, when everybody in town knew that Sander's father-in-law give 'em to his wife for a wedding present eighteen years before, an' they was full-grown mules then."

Everyone chuckled, and the Grand Army man rubbed his knees with a spasm of childish delight.

"Harve never was much account for anything practical, and he shore was never fond of work," began the coal-and-lumber dealer. "I mind the last time he was home; the day he left, when the old man was out to the barn helpin' his hand hitch up to take Harve to the train, and Cal Moots was patchin' up the fence, Harve, he come out on the step and sings out, in his ladylike voice: 'Cal Moots, Cal Moots! please come cord my trunk.'"

"That's Harve for you," approved the Grand Army man gleefully. "I kin hear him howlin' yet when he was a big feller in long pants and his mother used to whale him with a rawhide in the barn for lettin' the cows git foundered in the cornfield when he was drivin' 'em home from pasture. He killed a cow of mine that-a-way onc't--a pure Jersey and the best milker I had, an' the ole man had to put up for her. Harve, he was watchin' the sun set acros't the marshes when the anamile got away; he argued that sunset was oncommon fine."

"Where the old man made his mistake was in sending the boy East to school," said Phelps, stroking his goatee and speaking in a deliberate, judicial tone. "There was where he got his head full of traipsing to Paris and all such folly. What Harve needed, of all people, was a course in some first-class Kansas City business college."

The letters were swimming before Steavens's eyes. Was it possible that these men did not understand, that the palm on the coffin meant nothing to them? The very name of their town would have remained forever buried in the postal guide had it not been now and again mentioned in the world in connection with Harvey Merrick's. He remembered what his master had said to him on the day of his death, after the congestion of both lungs had shut off any probability of recovery, and the sculptor had asked his pupil to send his body home. "It's not a pleasant place to be lying while the world is moving and doing and bettering," he had said with a feeble smile, "but it rather seems as though we ought to go back to the place we came from in the end. The townspeople will come in for a look at me; and after they have had their say I shan't have much to fear from the judgment of God. The wings of the Victory, in there"--with a weak gesture toward his studio--"will not shelter me."

The cattleman took up the comment. "Forty's young for a Merrick to cash in; they usually hang on pretty well. Probably he helped it along with whisky."

"His mother's people were not long-lived, and Harvey never had a robust constitution," said the minister mildly. He would have liked to say more. He had been the boy's Sunday-school teacher, and had been fond of him; but he felt that he was not in a position to speak. His own sons had turned out badly, and it was not a year since one of them had made his last trip home in the express car, shot in a gambling house in the Black Hills.

"Nevertheless, there is no disputin' that Harve frequently looked upon the wine when it was red, also variegated, and it shore made an uncommon fool of him," moralized the cattleman.

Just then the door leading into the parlor rattled loudly, and everyone started involuntarily, looking relieved when only Jim Laird came out. His red face was convulsed with anger, and the Grand Army man ducked his head when he saw the spark in his blue, bloodshot eye. They were all afraid of Jim; he was a drunkard, but he could twist the law to suit his client's needs as no other man in all western Kansas could do; and there were many who tried. The lawyer closed the door gently behind him, leaned back against it and folded his arms, cocking his head a little to one side. When he assumed this attitude in the courtroom, ears were always pricked up, as it usually foretold a flood of withering sarcasm.

"I've been with you gentlemen before," he began in a dry, even tone, "when you've sat by the coffins of boys born and raised in this town; and, if I remember rightly, you were never any too well satisfied when you checked them up. What's the matter, anyhow? Why is it that reputable young men are as scarce as millionaires in Sand City? It might almost seem to a stranger that there was some way something the matter with your progressive town. Why did Ruben Sayer, the brightest young lawyer you ever turned out, after he had come home from the university as straight as a die, take to drinking and forge a check and shoot himself? Why did Bill Merrit's son die of the shakes in a saloon in Omaha? Why was Mr. Thomas's son, here, shot in a gambling house? Why did young Adams burn his mill to beat the insurance companies and go to the pen?"

The lawyer paused and unfolded his arms, laying one clenched fist quietly on the table. "I'll tell you why. Because you drummed nothing but money and knavery into their ears from the time they wore knickerbockers; because you carped away at them as you've been carping here tonight, holding our friends Phelps and Elder up to them for their models, as our grandfathers held up George Washington and John Adams. But the boys, worse luck, were young and raw at the business you put them to; and how could they match coppers with such artists as Phelps and Elder? You wanted them to be successful rascals; they were only unsuccessful ones--that's all the difference. There was only one boy ever raised in this borderland between ruffianism and civilization who didn't come to grief, and you hated Harvey Merrick more for winning out than you hated all the other boys who got under the wheels. Lord, Lord, how you did hate him! Phelps, here, is fond of saying that he could buy

and sell us all out any time he's a mind to; but he knew Harve wouldn't have given a tinker's damn for his bank and all his cattle farms put together; and a lack of appreciation, that way, goes hard with Phelps.

"Old Nimrod, here, thinks Harve drank too much; and this from such as Nimrod and me!"

"Brother Elder says Harve was too free with the old man's money--fell short in filial consideration, maybe. Well, we can all remember the very tone in which brother Elder swore his own father was a liar, in the county court; and we all know that the old man came out of that partnership with his son as bare as a sheared lamb. But maybe I'm getting personal, and I'd better be driving ahead at what I want to say."

The lawyer paused a moment, squared his heavy shoulders, and went on: "Harvey Merrick and I went to school together, back East. We were dead in earnest, and we wanted you all to be proud of us some day. We meant to be great men. Even I, and I haven't lost my sense of humor, gentlemen, I meant to be a great man. I came back here to practice, and I found you didn't in the least want me to be a great man. You wanted me to be a shrewd lawyer--oh, yes! Our veteran here wanted me to get him an increase of pension, because he had dyspepsia; Phelps wanted a new county survey that would put the widow Wilson's little bottom farm inside his south line; Elder wanted to lend money at 5 per cent a month and get it collected; old Stark here wanted to wheedle old women up in Vermont into investing their annuities in real estate mortgages that are not worth the paper they are written on. Oh, you needed me hard enough, and you'll go on needing me; and that's why I'm not afraid to plug the truth home to you this once.

"Well, I came back here and became the damned shyster you wanted me to be. You pretend to have some sort of respect for me; and yet you'll stand up and throw mud at Harvey Merrick, whose soul you couldn't dirty and whose hands you couldn't tie. Oh, you're a discriminating lot of Christians! There have been times when the sight of Harvey's name in some Eastern paper has made me hang my head like a whipped dog; and, again, times when I liked to think of him off there in the world, away from all this hog wallow, doing his great work and climbing the big, clean upgrade he'd set for himself.

"And we? Now that we've fought and lied and sweated and stolen, and hated as only the disappointed strugglers in a bitter, dead little Western town know how to do, what have we got to show for it? Harvey Merrick wouldn't have given one sunset over your marshes for all you've got put together, and you know it. It's not for me to say why, in the inscrutable wisdom of God, a genius should ever have been called from this place of hatred and bitter waters; but I want this Boston man to know that the drivel he's been hearing here tonight is the only tribute any truly great man could ever have from such a lot of sick,

side-tracked, burnt-dog, land-poor sharks as the here-present financiers of Sand City--upon which town may God have mercy!"

The lawyer thrust out his hand to Steavens as he passed him, caught up his overcoat in the hall, and had left the house before the Grand Army man had had time to lift his ducked head and crane his long neck about at his fellows.

Next day Jim Laird was drunk and unable to attend the funeral services. Steavens called twice at his office, but was compelled to start East without seeing him. He had a presentiment that he would hear from him again, and left his address on the lawyer's table; but if Laird found it, he never acknowledged it. The thing in him that Harvey Merrick had loved must have gone underground with Harvey Merrick's coffin; for it never spoke again, and Jim got the cold he died of driving across the Colorado mountains to defend one of Phelps's sons, who had got into trouble out there by cutting government timber.



HAND AND HEART.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of **The Grey Woman and other Tales**,
by Mrs. (Elizabeth) Gaskell

"Mother, I should so like to have a great deal of money," said little Tom Fletcher one evening, as he sat on a low stool by his mother's knee. His mother was knitting busily by the firelight, and they had both been silent for some time.

"What would you do with a great deal of money if you had it?"

"Oh! I don't know--I would do a great many things. But should not you like to have a great deal of money, mother?" persisted he.

"Perhaps I should," answered Mrs. Fletcher. "I am like you sometimes, dear, and think that I should be very glad of a little more money. But then I don't think I am like you in one thing, for I have always some little plan in my mind, for which I should want the money. I never wish for it just for its own sake."

"Why, mother! there are so many things we could do if we had but money;--real good, wise things I mean."

"And if we have real good, wise things in our head to do, which cannot be done without money, I can quite enter into the wish for money. But you know, my little boy, you did not tell me of any good or wise thing."

"No! I believe I was not thinking of good or wise things just then, but only how much I should like money to do what I liked," answered little Tom ingenuously, looking up in his mother's face. She smiled down upon him, and stroked his head. He knew she was pleased with him for having told her openly what was passing in his mind. Presently he began again.

"Mother, if you wanted to do something very good and wise, and if you could not do it without money, what should you do?"

"There are two ways of obtaining money for such wants; one is by earning; and the other is by saving. Now both are good, because both imply self-denial. Do you understand me, Tom? If you have to earn money, you must steadily go on doing what you do not like perhaps; such as working when you would like to be playing, or in bed, or sitting talking with me over the fire. You deny yourself these little pleasures; and that is a good habit in itself, to say nothing of the industry and energy you have to exert in working. If you save money, you can easily see how you exercise self-denial. You do without something you wish for in order to possess the money it would have cost. Inasmuch as self-denial, energy, and industry are all good things, you do well either to earn or to save. But you see the purpose for which you want the money must be taken into consideration. You say, for 'something wise and good.' Either earning or saving becomes holy in this case. I must then think which will be most consistent with my other duties, before I decide whether I will earn or save money."

"I don't quite know what you mean, mother."

"I will try and explain myself. You know I have to keep a little shop, and to try and get employment in knitting stockings, and to clean my house, and to mend our clothes, and many other things. Now, do you think I should be doing my duty if I left you in the evenings, when you come home from school, to go out as a waiter at ladies' parties? I could earn a good deal of money by it, and I could spend it well among those who are poorer than I am (such as lame Harry), but then I should be leaving you alone in the little time that we have to be together; I do not think I should be doing right even for our 'good and wise purpose' to earn money, if it took me away from you at nights: do you, Tom?"

"No, indeed; you never mean to do it, do you, mother?"

"No," said she, smiling; "at any rate not till you are older. You see at

present then, I cannot earn money, if I want a little more than usual to help a sick neighbour. I must then try and save money. Nearly every one can do that."

"Can we, mother? We are so careful of everything. Ned Dixon calls us stingy: what could we save?"

"Oh, many and many a little thing. We use many things which are luxuries; which we do not want, but only use them for pleasure. Tea and sugar--butter--our Sunday's dinner of bacon or meat--the grey ribbon I bought for my bonnet, because you thought it prettier than the black, which was cheaper; all these are luxuries. We use very little tea or sugar, it is true; but we might do without any."

"You did do without any, mother, for a long, long time, you know, to help widow Black; it was only for your bad head-aches."

"Well! but you see we can save money; a penny, a halfpenny a day, or even a penny a week, would in time make a little store ready to be applied to the 'good and wise' purpose, when the time comes. But do you know, my little boy, I think we may be considering money too much as the only thing required if we want to do a kindness."

"If it is not the only thing, it is the chief thing, at any rate."

"No, love, it is not the chief thing. I should think very poorly of that beggar who liked sixpence given with a curse (as I have sometimes heard it), better than the kind and gentle words some people use in refusing to give. The curse sinks deep into the heart; or if it does not, it is a proof that the poor creature has been made hard before by harsh treatment. And mere money can do little to cheer a sore heart. It is kindness only that can do this. Now we have all of us kindness in our power. The little child of two years old, who can only just totter about, can show kindness?"

"Can I, mother?"

"To be sure, dear; and you often do, only perhaps not quite so often as you might do. Neither do I. But instead of wishing for money (of which I don't think either you or I are ever likely to have much), suppose you try to-morrow how you can make people happier, by thinking of little loving actions of help. Let us try and take for our text, 'Silver and gold I have none, but such as I have give I unto thee.'"

"Ay, mother, we will."

Must I tell you about little Tom's "to-morrow."

I do not know if little Tom dreamed of what his mother and he had been talking about, but I do know that the first thing he thought about, when

he awoke in the morning, was his mother's saying that he might try how many kind actions he could do that day without money; and he was so impatient to begin, that he jumped up and dressed himself, although it was more than an hour before his usual time of getting up. All the time he kept wondering what a little boy like him, only eight years old, could do for other people; till at last he grew so puzzled with inventing occasions for showing kindness, that he very wisely determined to think no more about it, but learn his lessons very perfectly; that was the first thing he had to do; and then he would try, without too much planning beforehand, to keep himself ready to lend a helping hand, or to give a kind word, when the right time came. So he screwed himself into a corner, out of the way of his mother's sweeping and dusting, and tucked his feet up on the rail of the chair, turned his face to the wall, and in about half an hour's time, he could turn round with a light heart, feeling he had learnt his lesson well, and might employ his time as he liked till breakfast was ready. He looked round the room; his mother had arranged all neatly, and was now gone to the bedroom; but the coal-scuttle and the can for water were empty, and Tom ran away to fill them; and as he came back with the latter from the pump, he saw Ann Jones (the scold of the neighbourhood) hanging out her clothes on a line stretched across from side to side of the little court, and speaking very angrily and loudly to her little girl, who was getting into some mischief in the house-place, as her mother perceived through the open door.

"There never were such plagues as my children are, to be sure," said Ann Jones, as she went into her house, looking very red and passionate. Directly after, Tom heard the sound of a slap, and then a little child's cry of pain.

"I wonder," thought he, "if I durst go and offer to nurse and play with little Hester. Ann Jones is fearful cross, and just as likely to take me wrong as right; but she won't box me for mother's sake; mother nursed Jemmy many a day through the fever, so she won't slap me, I think. Any rate, I'll try." But it was with a beating heart he said to the fierce-looking Mrs. Jones, "Please, may I go and play with Hester. May be I could keep her quiet while you're busy hanging out clothes."

"What! and let you go slopping about, I suppose, just when I'd made all ready for my master's breakfast. Thank you, but my own children's mischief is as much as I reckon on; I'll have none of strange lads in my house."

"I did not mean to do mischief or slop," said Tom, a little sadly at being misunderstood in his good intentions. "I only wanted to help."

"If you want to help, lift me up those clothes' pegs, and save me stooping; my back's broken with it."

Tom would much rather have gone to play with and amuse little Hester;

but it was true enough that giving Mrs. Jones the clothes' pegs as she wanted them would help her as much; and perhaps keep her from being so cross with her children if they did anything to hinder her. Besides, little Hester's cry had died away, and she was evidently occupied in some new pursuit (Tom could only hope that it was not in mischief this time); so he began to give Ann the pegs as she wanted them, and she, soothed by his kind help, opened her heart a little to him.

"I wonder how it is your mother has trained you up to be so handy, Tom; you're as good as a girl--better than many a girl. I don't think Hester in three years' time will be as thoughtful as you. There!" (as a fresh scream reached them from the little ones inside the house), "they are at some mischief again; but I'll teach 'em," said she, getting down from her stool in a fresh access of passion.

"Let me go," said Tom, in a begging voice, for he dreaded the cruel sound of another slap. "I'll lift the basket of pegs on to a stool, so that you need not stoop; and I'll keep the little ones safe out of mischief till you're done. Do let me go, missus."

With some grumblings at losing his help, she let him go into the house-place. He found Hester, a little girl of five, and two younger ones. They had been fighting for a knife, and in the struggle, the second, Johnnie, had cut his finger--not very badly, but he was frightened at the sight of the blood; and Hester, who might have helped, and who was really sorry, stood sullenly aloof, dreading the scolding her mother always gave her if either of the little ones hurt themselves while under her care.

"Hester," said Tom, "will you get me some cold water, please? it will stop the bleeding better than anything. I daresay you can find me a basin to hold it."

Hester trotted off, pleased at Tom's confidence in her power. When the bleeding was partly stopped, he asked her to find him a bit of rag, and she scrambled under the dresser for a little piece she had hidden there the day before. Meanwhile, Johnny ceased crying, he was so interested in all the preparation for dressing his little wound, and so much pleased to find himself an object of so much attention and consequence. The baby, too, sat on the floor, gravely wondering at the commotion; and thus busily occupied, they were quiet and out of mischief till Ann Jones came in, and, having hung out her clothes, and finished that morning's piece of work, she was ready to attend to her children in her rough, hasty kind of way.

"Well! I'm sure, Tom, you've tied it up as neatly as I could have done. I wish I'd always such an one as you to see after the children; but you must run off now, lad, your mother was calling you as I came in, and I said I'd send you--good-by, and thank you."

As Tom was going away, the baby, sitting in square gravity on the floor, but somehow conscious of Tom's gentle helpful ways, put up her mouth to be kissed; and he stooped down in answer to the little gesture, feeling very happy, and very full of love and kindness.

After breakfast, his mother told him it was school time, and he must set off, as she did not like him to run in out of breath and flurried, just when the schoolmaster was going to begin; but she wished him to come in decently and in order, with quiet decorum, and thoughtfulness as to what he was going to do. So Tom got his cap and his bag, and went off with a light heart, which I suppose made his footsteps light, for he found himself above half way to school while it wanted yet a quarter to the time. So he slackened his pace, and looked about him a little more than he had been doing. There was a little girl on the other side of the street carrying a great big basket, and lugging along a little child just able to walk; but who, I suppose, was tired, for he was crying pitifully, and sitting down every two or three steps. Tom ran across the street, for, as perhaps you have found out, he was very fond of babies, and could not bear to hear them cry.

"Little girl, what is he crying about? Does he want to be carried? I'll take him up, and carry him as far as I go alongside of you."

So saying, Tom was going to suit the action to the word; but the baby did not choose that any one should carry him but his sister, and refused Tom's kindness. Still he could carry the heavy basket of potatoes for the little girl, which he did as far as their road lay together, when she thanked him, and bade him good-by, and said she could manage very well now, her home was so near. So Tom went into school very happy and peaceful; and had a good character to take home to his mother for that morning's lesson.

It happened that this very day was the weekly half-holiday, so that Tom had many hours unoccupied that afternoon. Of course, his first employment after dinner was to learn his lessons for the next day; and then, when he had put his books away, he began to wonder what he should do next.

He stood lounging against the door wishing all manner of idle wishes; a habit he was apt to fall into. He wished he were the little boy who lived opposite, who had three brothers ready to play with him on half-holidays; he wished he were Sam Harrison, whose father had taken him one day a trip by the railroad; he wished he were the little boy who always went with the omnibuses,--it must be so pleasant to go riding about on the step, and to see so many people; he wished he were a sailor, to sail away to the countries where grapes grew wild, and monkeys and parrots were to be had for the catching. Just as he was wishing himself the little Prince of Wales, to drive about in a goat-carriage, and wondering if he should not feel very shy with the three great ostrich-feathers always niddle-nodding on his head, for

people to know him by, his mother came from washing up the dishes, and saw him deep in the reveries little boys and girls are apt to fall into when they are the only children in a house.

"My dear Tom," said she, "why don't you go out, and make the most of this fine afternoon?"

"Oh, mother," answered he (suddenly recalled to the fact that he was little Tom Fletcher, instead of the Prince of Wales, and consequently feeling a little bit flat), "it is so dull going out by myself. I have no one to play with. Can't you go with me, mother--just this once, into the fields?"

Poor Mrs. Fletcher heartily wished she could gratify this very natural desire of her little boy; but she had the shop to mind, and many a little thing besides to do; it was impossible. But however much she might regret a thing, she was too faithful to repine. So, after a moment's thought, she said, cheerfully, "Go into the fields for a walk, and see how many wild flowers you can bring me home, and I'll get down father's jug for you to put them in when you come back."

"But, mother, there are so few pretty flowers near a town," said Tom, a little unwillingly, for it was a coming down from being Prince of Wales, and he was not yet quite reconciled to it.

"Oh dear! there are a great many if you'll only look for them. I dare say you'll make me up as many as twenty different kinds."

"Will you reckon daisies, mother?"

"To be sure; they are just as pretty as any."

"Oh, if you'll reckon such as them, I dare say I can bring you more than twenty."

So off he ran; his mother watching him till he was out of sight, and then she returned to her work. In about two hours he came back, his pale cheeks looking quite rosy, and his eyes quite bright. His country walk, taken with cheerful spirits, had done him all the good his mother desired, and had restored his usually even, happy temper.

"Look, mother! here are three-and-twenty different kinds; you said I might count all, so I have even counted this thing like a nettle with lilac flowers, and this little common blue thing."

"Robin-run-in-the-hedge is its name," said his mother. "It's very pretty if you look at it close. One, two, three"--she counted them all over, and there really were three-and-twenty. She went to reach down the best jug.

"Mother," said little Tom, "do you like them very much?"

"Yes, very much," said she, not understanding his meaning. He was silent, and gave a little sigh. "Why, my dear?"

"Oh, only--it does not signify if you like them very much; but I thought how nice it would be to take them to lame Harry, who can never walk so far as the fields, and can hardly know what summer is like, I think."

"Oh, that will be very nice; I am glad you thought of it."

Lame Harry was sitting by himself, very patiently, in a neighbouring cellar. He was supported by his daughter's earnings; but as she worked in a factory, he was much alone.

If the bunch of flowers had looked pretty in the fields, they looked ten times as pretty in the cellar to which they were now carried. Lame Harry's eyes brightened up with pleasure at the sight; and he began to talk of the times long ago, when he was a little boy in the country, and had a corner of his father's garden to call his own, and grow lad's-love and wall-flower in. Little Tom put them in water for him, and put the jug on the table by him; on which his daughter had placed the old Bible, worn with much reading, although treated with careful reverence. It was lying open, with Harry's horn spectacles put in to mark the place.

"I reckon my spectacles are getting worn out; they are not so clear as they used to be; they are dim-like before my eyes, and it hurts me to read long together," said Harry. "It's a sad miss to me. I never thought the time long when I could read; but now I keep wearying for the day to be over, though the nights, when I cannot sleep for my legs paining me, are almost as bad. However, it's the Lord's will."

"Would you like me--I cannot read very well aloud, but I'd do my best, if you'd like me to read a bit to you. I'll just run home and get my tea, and be back directly." And off Tom ran.

He found it very pleasant reading aloud to lame Harry, for the old man had so much to say that was worth listening to, and was so glad of a listener, that I think there was as much talking as reading done that evening. But the Bible served as a text-book to their conversation; for in a long life old Harry had seen and heard so much, which he had connected with events, or promises, or precepts contained in the Scriptures, that it was quite curious to find how everything was brought in and dove-tailed, as an illustration of what they were reading.

When Tom got up to go away, lame Harry gave him many thanks, and told him he would not sleep the worse for having made an old man's evening so pleasant. Tom came home in high self-satisfaction. "Mother," said he, "it's all very true what you said about the good that may be done without money: I've done many pieces of good to-day without a farthing."

First," said he, taking hold of his little finger, "I helped Ann Jones with hanging out her clothes when she was"--

His mother had been listening while she turned over the pages of the New Testament which lay by her, and now having found what she wanted, she put her arm gently round his waist, and drew him fondly towards her. He saw her finger put under one passage, and read,--

"Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

He was silent in a moment.

Then his mother spoke in her soft low voice:--"Dearest Tom, though I don't want us to talk about it, as if you had been doing more than just what you ought, I am glad you have seen the truth of what I said; how far more may be done by the loving heart than by mere money-giving; and every one may have the loving heart."

I have told you of one day of little Tom's life, when he was eight years old, and lived with his mother. I must now pass over a year, and tell you of a very different kind of life he had then to lead. His mother had never been very strong, and had had a good deal of anxiety; at last she was taken ill, and soon felt that there was no hope for her recovery. For a long time the thought of leaving her little boy was a great distress to her, and a great trial to her faith. But God strengthened her, and sent his peace into her soul, and before her death she was content to leave her precious child in his hands, who is a Father to the fatherless, and defendeth the cause of the widow.

When she felt that she had not many more days to live, she sent for her husband's brother, who lived in a town not many miles off; and gave her little Tom in charge to him to bring up.

"There are a few pounds in the savings-bank--I don't know how many exactly--and the furniture and bit of stock in the shop; perhaps they would be enough to bring him up to be a joiner, like his father before him."

She spoke feebly, and with many pauses. Her brother-in-law, though a rough kind of man, wished to do all he could to make her feel easy in her last moments, and touched with the reference to his dead brother, promised all she required.

"I'll take him back with me after"--the funeral, he was going to say, but he stopped. She smiled gently, fully understanding his meaning.

"We shall, may be, not be so tender with him as you've been; but I'll see he comes to no harm. It will be a good thing for him to rough it a bit with other children,--he's too nesh for a boy; but I'll pay them if they aren't kind to him in the long run, never fear."

Though this speech was not exactly what she liked, there was quite enough of good feeling in it to make her thankful for such a protector and friend for her boy. And so, thankful for the joys she had had, and thankful for the sorrows which had taught her meekness, thankful for life, and thankful for death, she died.

Her brother-in-law arranged all as she had wished. After the quiet simple funeral was over, he took Tom by the hand, and set off on the six-mile walk to his home. Tom had cried till he could cry no more, but sobs came quivering up from his heart every now and then, as he passed some well-remembered cottage, or thorn-bush, or tree on the road. His uncle was very sorry for him, but did not know what to say, or how to comfort him.

"Now mind, lad, thou com'st to me if thy cousins are o'er hard upon thee. Let me hear if they misuse thee, and I'll give it them."

Tom shrunk from the idea that this gave him of the cousins, whose companionship he had, until then, been looking forward to as a pleasure. He was not reassured when, after threading several streets and by-ways, they came into a court of dingy-looking houses, and his uncle opened the door of one, from which the noise of loud, if not angry voices was heard.

A tall large woman was whirling one child out of her way with a rough movement of her arm; while she was scolding a boy a little older than Tom, who stood listening sullenly to her angry words.

"I'll tell father of thee, I will," said she; and turning to uncle John, she began to pour out her complaints against Jack, without taking any notice of little Tom, who clung to his uncle's hand as to a protector in the scene of violence into which he had entered.

"Well, well, wife!--I'll leather Jack the next time I catch him letting the water out of the pipe; but now get this lad and me some tea, for we're weary and tired."

His aunt seemed to wish Jack might be leathered now, and to be angry with her husband for not revenging her injuries; for an injury it was that the boy had done her in letting the water all run off, and that on the very eve of the washing day. The mother grumbled as she left off mopping the wet floor, and went to the fire to stir it up ready for the kettle, without a word of greeting to her little nephew, or of welcome to her husband. On the contrary, she complained of the trouble of getting tea ready afresh, just when she had put slack on the fire, and had no water in the house to fill the kettle with. Her husband grew angry, and Tom was frightened to hear his uncle speaking sharply.

"If I can't have a cup of tea in my own house without all this ado, I'll

go to the Spread Eagle, and take Tom with me. They've a bright fire there at all times, choose how they manage it; and no scolding wives. Come, Tom, let's be off."

Jack had been trying to scrape acquaintance with his cousin by winks and grimaces behind his mother's back, and now made a sign of drinking out of an imaginary glass. But Tom clung to his uncle, and softly pulled him down again on his chair, from which he had risen to go to the public-house.

"If you please, ma'am," said he, sadly frightened of his aunt, "I think I could find the pump, if you'd let me try."

She muttered something like an acquiescence; so Tom took up the kettle, and, tired as he was, went out to the pump. Jack, who had done nothing but mischief all day, stood amazed, but at last settled that his cousin was a "softy."

When Tom came back, he tried to blow the fire with the broken bellows, and at last the water boiled, and the tea was made. "Thou'rt a rare lad, Tom," said his uncle. "I wonder when our Jack will be of as much use."

This comparison did not please either Jack or his mother, who liked to keep to herself the privilege of directing their father's dissatisfaction with his children. Tom felt their want of kindness towards him; and now that he had nothing to do but rest and eat, he began to feel very sad, and his eyes kept filling with tears, which he brushed away with the back of his hand, not wishing to have them seen. But his uncle noticed him.

"Thou had'st better have had a glass at the Spread Eagle," said he, compassionately.

"No; I only am rather tired. May I go to bed?" said he, longing for a good cry unobserved under the bed-clothes.

"Where's he to sleep?" asked the husband of the wife.

"Nay," said she, still offended on Jack's account, "that's thy look-out. He's thy flesh and blood, not mine."

"Come, wife," said uncle John, "he's an orphan, poor chap. An orphan is kin to every one."

She was softened directly, for she had much kindness in her, although this evening she had been so much put out.

"There's no place for him but with Jack and Dick. We've the baby, and the other three are packed close enough."

She took Tom up to the little back room, and stopped to talk with him for a minute or two, for her husband's words had smitten her heart, and she was sorry for the ungracious reception she had given Tom at first.

"Jack and Dick are never in bed till we come, and it's work enough to catch them then on fine evenings," said she, as she took the candle away.

Tom tried to speak to God as his mother had taught him, out of the fulness of his little heart, which was heavy enough that night. He tried to think how she would have wished him to speak and to do, and when he felt puzzled with the remembrance of the scene of disorder and anger which he had seen, he earnestly prayed God would make and keep clear his path before him. And then he fell asleep.

He had had a long dream of other and happier days, and had thought he was once more taking a Sunday evening walk with his mother, when he was roughly wakened up by his cousins.

"I say, lad, you're lying right across the bed. You must get up, and let Dick and me come in, and then creep into the space that's left."

Tom got up dizzy and half awake. His cousins got into bed, and then squabbled about the largest share. It ended in a kicking match, during which Tom stood shivering by the bedside.

"I'm sure we're pinched enough as it is," said Dick at last. "And why they've put Tom in with us I can't think. But I'll not stand it. Tom shan't sleep with us. He may lie on the floor, if he likes. I'll not hinder him."

He expected an opposition from Tom, and was rather surprised when he heard the little fellow quietly lie down, and cover himself as well as he could with his clothes. After some more quarrelling, Jack and Dick fell asleep. But in the middle of the night Dick awoke, and heard by Tom's breathing that he was still awake, and was crying gently.

"What! molly-coddle, crying for a softer bed?" asked Dick.

"Oh, no--I don't care for that--if--oh! if mother were but alive," little Tom sobbed aloud.

"I say," said Dick, after a pause. "There's room at my back, if you'll creep in. There! don't be afraid--why, how cold you are, lad."

Dick was sorry for his cousin's loss, but could not speak about it. However, his kind tone sank into Tom's heart, and he fell asleep once more.

The three boys all got up at the same time in the morning, but were

not inclined to talk. Jack and Dick put on their clothes as fast as possible, and ran downstairs; but this was quite a different way of going on to what Tom had been accustomed. He looked about for some kind of basin or mug to wash in; there was none--not even a jug of water in the room. He slipped on a few necessary clothes, and went downstairs, found a pitcher, and went off to the pump. His cousins, who were playing in the court, laughed at him, and would not tell him where the soap was kept: he had to look some minutes before he could find it. Then he went back to the bedroom; but on entering it from the fresh air, the smell was so oppressive that he could not endure it. Three people had been breathing the air all night, and had used up every particle many times over and over again; and each time that it had been sent out from the lungs, it was less fit than before to be breathed again. They had not felt how poisonous it was while they stayed in it; they had only felt tired and unrefreshed, with a dull headache; but now that Tom came back again into it, he could not mistake its oppressive nature. He went to the window to try and open it. It was what people call a "Yorkshire light," where you know one-half has to be pushed on one side. It was very stiff, for it had not been opened for a long time. Tom pushed against it with all his might; at length it gave way with a jerk; and the shake sent out a cracked pane, which fell on the floor in a hundred little bits. Tom was sadly frightened when he saw what he had done. He would have been sorry to have done mischief at any time, but he had seen enough of his aunt the evening before to find out that she was sharp, and hasty, and cross; and it was hard to have to begin the first day in his new home by getting into a scrape. He sat down on the bedside, and began to cry. But the morning air blowing in upon him, refreshed him, and made him feel stronger. He grew braver as he washed himself in the pure, cold water. "She can't be cross with me longer than a day; by to-night it will be all over; I can bear it for a day."

Dick came running upstairs for something he had forgotten.

"My word, Tom! but you'll catch it!" exclaimed he, when he saw the broken window. He was half pleased at the event, and half sorry for Tom. "Mother did so beat Jack last week for throwing a stone right through the window downstairs. He kept out of the way till night, but she was on the look-out for him, and as soon as she saw him, she caught hold of him and gave it him. Eh! Tom, I would not be you for a deal!"

Tom began to cry again at this account of his aunt's anger; Dick became more and more sorry for him.

"I'll tell thee what; we'll go down and say it was a lad in yon back-yard throwing stones, and that one went smack through the window. I've got one in my pocket that will just do to show."

"No," said Tom, suddenly stopping crying. "I dare not do that."

"Daren't! Why you'll have to dare much more if you go down and face

mother without some such story."

"No! I shan't. I shan't have to dare God's anger. Mother taught me to fear that; she said I need never be really afraid of aught else. Just be quiet, Dick, while I say my prayers."

Dick watched his little cousin kneel down by the bed, and bury his face in the clothes; he did not say any set prayer (which Dick was accustomed to think was the only way of praying), but Tom seemed, by the low murmuring which Dick heard, to be talking to a dear friend; and though at first he sobbed and cried, as he asked for help and strength, yet when he got up, his face looked calm and bright, and he spoke quietly as he said to Dick, "Now I'm ready to go and tell aunt."

"Aunt" meanwhile had missed her pitcher and her soap, and was in no good-tempered mood when Tom came to make his confession. She had been hindered in her morning's work by his taking her things away; and now he was come to tell her of the pane being broken and that it must be mended, and money must go all for a child's nonsense.

She gave him (as he had been led to expect) one or two very sharp blows. Jack and Dick looked on with curiosity, to see how he would take it; Jack, at any rate, expecting a hearty crying from "softy" (Jack himself had cried loudly at his last beating), but Tom never shed a tear, though his face did go very red, and his mouth did grow set with the pain. But what struck the boys more even than his being "hard" in bearing such blows, was his quietness afterwards. He did not grumble loudly, as Jack would have done, nor did he turn sullen, as was Dick's custom; but the minute afterwards he was ready to run an errand for his aunt; nor did he make any mention of the hard blows, when his uncle came in to breakfast, as his aunt had rather expected he would. She was glad he did not, for she knew her husband would have been displeased to know how early she had begun to beat his orphan nephew. So she almost felt grateful to Tom for his silence, and certainly began to be sorry she had struck him so hard.

Poor Tom! he did not know that his cousins were beginning to respect him, nor that his aunt was learning to like him; and he felt very lonely and desolate that first morning. He had nothing to do. Jack went to work at the factory; and Dick went grumbling to school. Tom wondered if he was to go to school again, but he did not like to ask. He sat on a little stool, as much out of his terrible aunt's way as he could. She had her youngest child, a little girl of about a year and a half old, crawling about on the floor. Tom longed to play with her; but he was not sure how far his aunt would like it. But he kept smiling at her, and doing every little thing he could to attract her attention and make her come to him. At last she was coaxed to come upon his knee. His aunt saw it, and though she did not speak, she did not look displeased. He did everything he could think of to amuse little Annie; and her mother was very glad to have her attended to. When Annie grew sleepy, she still

kept fast hold of one of Tom's fingers in her little, round, soft hand, and he began to know the happy feeling of loving somebody again. Only the night before, when his cousins had made him get out of bed, he had wondered if he should live to be an old man, and never have anybody to love all that long time; but now his heart felt quite warm to the little thing that lay on his lap.

"She'll tire you, Tom," said her mother, "you'd better let me put her down in the cot."

"Oh, no!" said he, "please don't! I like so much to have her here." He never moved, though she lay very heavy on his arm, for fear of waking her.

When she did rouse up, his aunt said, "Thank you, Tom. I've got my work done rarely with you for a nurse. Now take a run in the yard, and play yourself a bit."

His aunt was learning something, and Tom was teaching, though they would both have been very much surprised to hear it. Whenever, in a family, every one is selfish, and (as it is called) "stands up for his own rights," there are no feelings of gratitude; the gracefulness of "thanks" is never called for; nor can there be any occasion for thoughtfulness for others when those others are sure to get the start in thinking for themselves, and taking care of number one. Tom's aunt had never had to remind Jack or Dick to go out to play. They were ready enough to see after their own pleasures.

Well! dinner-time came, and all the family gathered to the meal. It seemed to be a scramble who should be helped first, and cry out for the best pieces. Tom looked very red. His aunt in her new-born liking for him, helped him early to what she thought he would like. But he did not begin to eat. It had been his mother's custom to teach her little son to say a simple "grace" with her before they began their dinner. He expected his uncle to follow the same observance; and waited. Then he felt very hot and shy; but, thinking that it was right to say it, he put away his shyness, and very quietly, but very solemnly said the old accustomed sentence of thanksgiving. Jack burst out laughing when he had done; for which Jack's father gave him a sharp rap and a sharp word, which made him silent through the rest of the dinner. But, excepting Jack, who was angry, I think all the family were the happier for having listened reverently (if with some surprise) to Tom's thanksgiving. They were not an ill-disposed set of people, but wanted thoughtfulness in their every-day life; that sort of thoughtfulness which gives order to a home, and makes a wise and holy spirit of love the groundwork of order.

From that first day Tom never went back in the regard he began then to win. He was useful to his aunt, and patiently bore her hasty ways, until for very shame she left off being hasty with one who was always so meek and mild. His uncle sometimes said he was more like a girl than a boy,

as was to be looked for from being brought up for so many years by a woman; but that was the greatest fault he ever had to find with him; and in spite of it, he really respected him for the very qualities which are most truly "manly;" for the courage with which he dared to do what was right, and the quiet firmness with which he bore many kinds of pain. As for little Annie, her friendship and favour and love were the delight of Tom's heart. He did not know how much the others were growing to like him, but Annie showed it in every way, and he loved her in return most dearly. Dick soon found out how useful Tom could be to him in his lessons; for though older than his cousin, Master Dick was a regular dunce, and had never even wished to learn till Tom came; and long before Jack could be brought to acknowledge it, Dick maintained that "Tom had a great deal of pluck in him, though it was not of Jack's kind."

Now I shall jump another year, and tell you a very little about the household twelve months after Tom had entered it. I said above that his aunt had learned to speak less crossly to one who was always gentle after her scoldings. By-and-by her ways to all became less hasty and passionate, for she grew ashamed of speaking to any one in an angry way before Tom; he always looked so sad and sorry to hear her. She has also spoken to him sometimes about his mother; at first because she thought he would like it; but latterly because she became really interested to hear of her ways; and Tom being an only child, and his mother's friend and companion, has been able to tell her of many household arts of comfort, which coming quite unconscious of any purpose, from the lips of a child, have taught her many things which she would have been too proud to learn from an older person. Her husband is softened by the additional cleanliness and peace of his home. He does not now occasionally take refuge in a public-house, to get out of the way of noisy children, an unswept hearth, and a scolding wife. Once when Tom was ill for a day or two, his uncle missed the accustomed grace, and began to say it himself. He is now the person to say "Silence, boys;" and then to ask the blessing on the meal. It makes them gather round the table, instead of sitting down here and there in the comfortless, unsociable way they used to do. Tom and Dick go to school together now, and Dick is getting on famously, and will soon be able to help his next brother over his lessons, as Tom has helped him.

Even Jack has been heard to acknowledge that Tom has "pluck" in him; and as "pluck" in Jack's mind is a short way of summing up all the virtues, he has lately become very fond of his cousin. Tom does not think about happiness, but is happy; and I think we may hope that he, and the household among whom he is adopted, will go "from strength to strength."

Now do you not see how much happier this family are from the one circumstance of a little child's coming among them? Could money have made one-tenth part of this real and increasing happiness? I think you will all say no. And yet Tom was no powerful person; he was not clever; he was very friendless at first; but he was loving and good; and on those two qualities, which any of us may have if we try, the blessing of

God lies in rich abundance.



HELPFULLY YOURS

from the Project Gutenberg EBook of **Helpfully Yours**, by Evelyn E. Smith

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[Sidenote: _"Come down to Earth--and stay there!" is a humiliating order for somebody with wings!_]

Tarb Morfatch had read all the information on Terrestrial customs that was available in the _Times_ morgue before she'd left Fizbus. And all through the journey she'd studied her _Brief Introduction to Terrestrial Manners and Mores_ avidly. Perhaps it was a bit overinspirational in spots, but it had facts in it, too.

So she knew that, since the natives were non-alate, she was not to take wing on Earth. She had, however, forgotten to correlate the knowledge of their winglessness with her own vertical habits. As a result, on leaving the tender that had ferried her down from the Moon, she looked up instead of right and narrowly escaped death at the jaws of a raging groundcar that swerved out onto the field.

She recognized it as a taxi from one of the pictures in the handbook. It was a pity, she thought sadly as she was knocked off her feet, that all those lessons she had so carefully learned were to go to waste.

But it was only the wind of the car's passage that had thrown her down. As she struggled to get up, hampered by her awkward native skirts, the door of the taxi flew open. A tall young man--a Fizbian--burst out, the soft yellowish-green down on his handsome face bristling with fright until each feather stood out separately.

"Miss Morfatch! Are you all right?"

"Just--just a little shaky," she murmured, brushing dirt from her rosy leg feathers. _Too young to be Drosmig; too good-looking to be anyone

important, she thought glumly. Must be the office boy._

To her surprise, he didn't help her up. Probably it would violate some native taboo if he did, she deduced. The handbook hadn't mentioned anything that seemed to apply, but, after all, a little book like that couldn't cover everything.

* * * * *

She could see the young man was embarrassed--his emerald crest was waving to and fro.

"I'm Stet Zarnon," he introduced himself awkwardly.

The Managing Editor! The handsome young employer of her girlish dreams! But perhaps he had a wife on Fizbus--no, the Grand Editor made a point of hiring people without families to use as a pretext for expensive vacations on the Home Planet.

As she opened her mouth to say something brilliantly witty, to show she was no ordinary female but a creature of spirit and fire and intelligence, a sudden cacophony of shrill cries and explosions arose, accompanied by bursts of light. Her feathers stood erect and she clung to her employer with both feathered legs.

"If these are the friendly diplomatic relations Earth and Fizbus are supposed to be enjoying," she said, "I'm not enjoying them one bit!"

"They're only taking pictures of you with native equipment," he explained, pulling away from her. What was the matter with him? "You're the first Fizbian woman ever to come to Terra, you know."

She certainly did know--and, what was more, she had made the semi-finals for Miss Fizbus only the year before. Perhaps he had some Terrestrial malady he didn't want her to catch. Or could it be that in the four years he had spent in voluntary exile on this planet, he had come to prefer the native females? Now it was her turn to shrink from him.

He was conversing rapidly in Terran with the chattering natives who milled about them. Although Tarb had been an honors student in Terran back at school, she found herself unable to understand more than an occasional word of what they said. Then she remembered that they were not at the world capital, Ottawa, but another community, New York. Undoubtedly they were all speaking some provincial dialect peculiar to the locality.

And nobody at all booed in appreciation, although, she told herself sternly, she really couldn't have expected them to. Standards of beauty were different in different solar systems. At least they were picking up as souvenirs some of the feathers she'd shed in her tumble, which showed

they took an interest.

Stet turned back to her. "These are fellow-members of the press."

She was able to catch enough of what he said next in Terran to understand that she was being formally introduced to the aboriginal journalists. Although you could never call the natives attractive, with their squat figures and curiously atrophied vestigial wings--_arms_, she reminded herself--they were very Fizboid in appearance and, with their winglessness cloaked, could have creditably passed for singed Fizbians.

Moreover, they seemed friendly; at any rate, the sounds they uttered were welcoming. She began to make the three ritual _entrechats_, but Stat stopped her. "Just smile at them; that'll be enough."

It didn't seem like enough, but he was the boss.

* * * * *

"Thank the stars we're through with that," he sighed, as they finally were able to escape their confrères and get into the taxi. "I suppose," he added, wriggling inside the clumsy Terrestrial jacket which, cut to fit over his wings, did nothing either to improve his figure or to make him look like a native, "it was as much of an ordeal for you as for me."

"Well, I am a little bewildered by it all," Tarb admitted, settling herself as comfortably as possible on the seat cushions.

"No, don't do that!" he cried. "Here people don't crouch on seats. They sit," he explained in a kindlier tone. "Like this."

"You mean I have to bend myself in that clumsy way?"

He nodded. "In public, at least."

"But it's so hard on the wings. I'm losing feathers foot over claw."

"Yes, but you could...." He stopped. "Well, anyhow, remember we have to comply with local customs. You see, the Terrestrials have those things called arms instead of legs. That is, they have legs, but they use them only for walking."

She sighed. "I'd read about the arms, but I had no idea the natives would be so--so primitive as to actually use them."

"Considering they had no wings, it was very clever of them to make use of the vestigial appendages," he said hotly. "If you take their physical limitations into account, they've done a marvelous job with their little planet. They can't fly; they have very little sense of balance; their vision is exceedingly poor--yet, in spite of all that, they have

achieved a quite remarkable degree of civilization." He gestured toward the horizontal building arrangements visible through the window. "Why, you could almost call those streets. As a matter of fact, the natives do."

At the moment, she could take an interest in Terrestrial civilization only as it affected her personally. "But I'll be able to relax in the office, won't I?"

"To a certain extent," he replied cautiously. "You see, we have to use a good deal of native help because--well, our facilities are limited...."

"Oh," she said.

Then she remembered that she was on Terra at least partly to demonstrate the pluck of Fizbian femininity. Back on Fizbus, most of the *_Times_* executives had been dead set against having a woman sent out as Drosmig's assistant. But Grupe, the Grand Editor, had overruled them. "Time we broke with tradition," he had said. He'd felt she could do the job, and, by the stars, she would justify his faith in her!

"Sounds like rather a lark," she said hollowly.

Stet brightened. "That's the girl!" His eyes, she noticed, were emerald shading into turquoise, like his crest. "I certainly hope you'll like it here. Very wise of Grupe to send a woman instead of a man, after all. Women," he went on quickly, "are so much better at working up the human interest angle. And Drosmig is out of commission most of the time, so it's you who'll actually be in charge of 'Helpfully Yours.'"

She herself in charge of the column that had achieved interstellar fame in three short years! Basically, it had been designed to give guidance, advice and, if necessary, comfort to those Fizbians who found themselves living on Terra, for the Fizbus *_Times_* had stood for public service from time immemorial. As Grupe had put it, "We don't run this paper for ourselves, Tarb, but for our readers. And the same applies to our Terrestrial edition."

With the growing development of trade and cultural relations between the two planets, the Fizbians on Earth were an ever-increasing number. But they were not the only readers of "Helpfully Yours." Reprinted in the parent paper, it was read with edification and pleasure all over Fizbus. Everyone wanted to learn more about the ancient and other-worldly Terran culture.

The handbook, *_A Brief Introduction to Terrestrial Manners and Mores_*, owed much of its content to "Helpfully Yours." A grateful, almost fulsome, introductory note had said so. But the column truly deserved all the praise that had been lavished upon it by the handbook. How well she had studied the thoughtful letters that filled it and the excellent

and well-reasoned advice--erring, if it erred at all, on the side of overtolerance--that had been given in return. Of course, on Earth, spiritual adjustment apparently was more important than the physical; you could tell that from the questions that were asked. A number of the letters had been reprinted in an appendix to the manual.

New York

Dear Senbot Drosmig:

When in contact with Terrestrial culture, I find myself constantly overawed and weighed down by the knowledge of my own inadequacy. I cannot seem to appreciate the local art forms as disseminated by the juke box, the comic strip, the tabloid.

How can I help myself toward a greater understanding?

Hopefully yours,

Gnurmis Plitt

* * * * *

Dear Mr. Plitt:

Remember, Orkv was not excavated in a week. It took the Terrestrials many centuries to develop their exquisite and esoteric art forms. How can you expect to comprehend them in a few short years? Expose yourself to their art. Work, study, meditate.

Understanding will come, I promise you.

Helpfully yours,

Senbot Drosmig

* * * * *

Paris

Dear Senbot Drosmig:

To think that I am enjoying the benefits of Terra while my wife and little ones are forced to remain on Fizbus makes my heart ache. Surely it is not fair that I should have so much and they so little. Imagine the inestimable advantage to the fledgling of even a short contact with Terrestrial culture!

_Why cannot my loved ones come to join me so that we can share all these wonderful spiritual experiences and be enriched by them

together?_

Poignantly yours,

Tpooly N'Ox

* * * *

Dear Mr. N'Ox:

After all, it has been only five years since Fizbian spaceships first came into contact with Terra. In keeping with our usual colonial policy--so inappropriate and anachronistic when applied to a well-developed civilization like Terra's--at first only males are allowed to go to the new world until it is made certain over a period of years that the planet is safe for mothers and future mothers of Fizbus.

But Stet Zarnon himself, the celebrated and capable editor of the Terran edition of _The Fizbus Times_, has taken up your cause, and I promise you that eventually your loved ones will be able to join you.

Meanwhile, work, study, meditate.

Helpfully yours,

Senbot Drosmig

* * * *

Ottawa

Dear Senbot Drosmig:

Having just completed a two-year tour of duty on Earth as part of a diplomatic mission, I am regretfully leaving this fair planet. What books, what objects of art, what, in short, souvenirs shall I take back to Fizbus which will give our people some small idea of Earth's rich cultural heritage and, at the same time, serve as useful and appropriate gifts for my friends and relatives back Home?

Inquiringly yours,

Solgus Zagroot

* * * *

Dear Mr. Zagroot:

Take back nothing but your memories. They will be your best souvenirs.

Out of context, any other mementos might convey little, if anything, of the true beauty and advanced spirituality of Terrestrial culture, and you might cheapen them were you to use them crassly as souvenirs. Furthermore, it is possible that you, in your ignorance, might unwittingly select some items that give a distorted and false idea of our extrafizbian friends.

The Fizbian-Earth Cultural Commission, sponsored by _The Fizbian Times_, in conjunction with the consulate, is preparing a vast program of cultural interchange. Leave it to them to do the great work, for you can be sure they will do it well.

And be sure to tell your fellow-laborers in the diplomatic vineyards that it is wiser not to send unapproved Terran souvenirs back Home. They might cause a fatal misunderstanding between the two worlds. Tell them to spend their time on Earth in working, studying and meditating, rather than shopping.

Helpfully yours,

Senbot Drosmig

* * * * *

And now she--Tarb Morfatch--herself was going to be the guiding spirit that brought enlightenment and uplift to countless thousands on Terra and millions on Fizbus. Her name wouldn't appear on the columns, but the reward of having helped should be enough. Besides, Drosmig was due to retire soon. If she proved herself competent, she would take over the column entirely and get the byline. Grupe had promised faithfully.

But what, she wondered, had put Drosmig "out of commission"?

The taxi drew up before a building with a vulgar number of floors showing above ground.

"Ah--before we--er--meet the others," Stet suggested, twitching his crest, "I was wondering whether you would care to--er--have dinner with me tonight?"

This roused Tarb from her speculations. "Oh, I'd love to!" _A date with the boss right away!_

Stet fumbled in his garments for appropriate tokens with which to pay the driver. "You--you're not engaged or anything back Home, Miss Morfatch?"

"Why, no," she said. "It so happens that I'm not."

"Splendid!" He made an abortive gesture with his leg, then let her get out of the taxi by herself. "It makes the natives stare," he explained abashedly.

"But why shouldn't they?" she asked, wondering whether to laugh or not. "How could they help but stare? We are different." _He must be joking._ She ventured a smile.

He smiled back, but made no reply.

The pavement was hard under her thinly covered soles. Now that walking looked as if it would present a problem, the ban on wing use loomed more threateningly. She had, of course, walked before--on wet days when her wings were waterlogged or in high winds or when she had surface business. However, the sidewalks on Fizbus were soft and resilient. Now she understood why the Terrestrials wore such crippling foot armor, but that didn't make her feel any better about it.

A box-shaped machine took the two Fizbians up to the twentieth story in twice the time it would have taken them to fly the same distance. Tarb supposed that the offices were in an attic instead of a basement because exchange difficulties forced the _Times_ to such economy. She wondered ruefully whether her own expense account would also suffer.

But it was no time to worry about such sordid matters; most important right now was making a favorable impression on her co-workers. She did want them to like her.

Taking out her compact, she carefully polished her eyeballs. The man at the controls of the machine practically performed a ritual _entrechat_.

"Don't do that!" Stet ordered in a harsh whisper.

"But why not?" she asked, unable to restrain a trace of belligerence from her voice. He hadn't been very polite himself. "The handbook said respectable Terran women make up in public. Why shouldn't I?"

He sighed. "It'll take time for you to catch on, I suppose. There's a lot the handbook doesn't--can't--cover. You'll find the setup here rather different from on Fizbus," he went on as he kicked open the door neatly lettered _THE FIZBUS TIMES_ in both Fizbian and Terran. "We've found it expedient to follow the local newspaper practice. For instance--" he indicated a small green-feathered man seated at a desk just beyond the railing that bisected the room horizontally--"we have a Copy Editor."

"What does he do?" she asked, confused.

"He copies news from the other papers, of course."

"And what are you doing tonight, Miss Morfatch?" the Copy Editor asked, springing up from his desk to execute the three ritual entrechats with somewhat more verve than was absolutely necessary.

"Having dinner with me," Stet said quickly.

"Pulling rank, eh, old bird? Well, we'll see whether position or sterling worth will win out in the end."

As the rest of the staff crowded around Tarb, leaping and booing as appreciatively as any girl could want, she managed to snatch a rapid look around. The place wasn't really so very much different from a Fizbian newsroom, once she got over the oddity of going across, not up and down, with the desks--queerly shaped but undeniably desks--arranged side by side instead of one over the other. There were chairs and stools, no perches, but that was to be expected in a wingless society. And it was noisy. Even though the little machines had stopped clattering when she came in, a distant roaring continued, as if, concealed somewhere close by, larger, more sinister machines continued their work. A peculiar smell hung in the air--not unpleasant, exactly, but strange.

She sniffed inquiringly.

"Ink," Stet said.

"What's that?"

"Oh, some stuff the boys in the back shop use. The feature writers," he went on quickly, before she could ask what the "back shop" was, "have private offices where they can perch in comfort."

He led the way down a corridor, opening doors. "Our drama editor." He indicated a middle-aged man with faded blue feathers, who hung head downward from his perch. "On the lobster-trick last night writing a review, so he's catching fifty-one twinkles now."

"Enchanted, Miss Morfatch," the critic said, opening one bright eye. "By a curious chance, it so happens that tonight I have two tickets to--"

"Tonight she's going out with me."

"Well, I can get tickets to any play, any night. And you haven't laughed unless you've seen a Terrestrial drama. Just say the word, chick."

Stet got Tarb out of the office and slammed the door shut. "Over here is the office of our food editor," he said, breathing hard, "whom you'll be expected to give a claw to now and then, since your jobs overlap. Can't

introduce you to him right now, though, because he's in the hospital with ptomaine poisoning. And this is the office you'll share with Drosmig."

Stet opened the door.

Underneath the perch, Senbot Drosmig, dean of Fizbian journalists, lay on the rug in a sodden stupor, letters to the editor scattered thickly over his shriveled person. The whole room reeked unmistakably of caffeine.

Tarb shrank back and twined both feet around Stet's. This time he did not repulse her. "But how can a--an educated, cultured man like Senbot Drosmig sink to such depths?"

"It's hard for anyone with even the slightest inclination toward the stuff to resist it here," Stet replied somberly. "I can't deny it; the sale of caffeine is absolutely unrestricted on Earth. Coffee shops all over the place. Coffee served freely at even the best homes. And not only coffee ... caffeine is insiduously present in other of their popular beverages."

Her eyes bulged sideways. "But how can a so-called civilized people be so depraved?"

"Caffeine doesn't seem to affect them the way it does us. Their nervous systems are so very uncomplicated, one almost envies them."

Drosmig stirred restlessly under his blanket of correspondence. "Go back ... Fizbus," he muttered. "Warn you ... 'fore ... too late ... like me."

Tarb's rose-pink feathers stood on end. She looked apprehensively at Stet.

"Senbot can't go back because he's in no shape to take the interstel drive." The young editor was obviously annoyed. "He's old and he's a physical wreck. But that certainly doesn't apply to you, Miss Morfatch." He looked long and hard into her eyes.

"Few years on planet," Drosmig groaned, struggling to his wings, "ply to anybody."

His feathers, Tarb noticed, were an ugly, darkish brown. She had never seen any one that color before, but she'd heard rumors that too much caffeine could do that to you. At least she hoped it was only the caffeine.

"For your information, he was almost as bad as this when he came!" Stet snapped. "Frankly, that's why he was sent here--to get rid of his

unfortunate addiction. Grupe had no idea, when he assigned him to Earth, that there was caffeine on the planet."

The old man gave a sardonic laugh as he clumsily made his way to the perch and gripped it with quivering toes.

"That is, I don't _think_ he knew," Stet said dubiously.

Tarb reached over and picked a letter off the floor. The Fizbian characters were clumsy and ill-made, as if someone had formed them with his feet. Could there be such poverty here that individuals existed who could not afford a scripto? The letter didn't read like any that had ever been printed in the column--at least none that had been picked up in the Fizbus edition:

* * * * *

New York

Dear Senbot Drosmig:

I am a subaltern clerk in the shipping department of the FizbEarth Trading Company, Inc. Although I have held this post for only three months, I have already won the respect and esteem of my superiors through my diligence and good character. My habits are exemplary: I do not gamble, sing, or take caffeine.

Earlier today, while engaged in evening meditation at my modest apartments, I was aroused by a peremptory knock at the door. I flung it open. A native stood there with a small case in his hand.

_ "Is the house on fire?" I asked, wondering which of my few humble possessions I should rescue first._

_ "No," he said. "I would like to interest you in some brushes."_

_ "Are the offices of the FizbEarth Trading Company, Inc., on fire?"_

_ "Not to my knowledge," he replied, opening his case. "Now I have here a very nice hairbrush--"_

I wanted to give him every chance. "Have you come to tell me of any disaster relative to the FizbEarth Trading Company, to myself, or to anyone or anything else with whom or with which I am connected?"

_ "Why, no," he said. "I have come to sell you brushes. Now here is a little number I know you'll like. My company developed it with you folks specially in mind. It's--"_

_ "Do you know, sir, that you have wantonly interrupted me in the midst of my meditations, which constitutes an established act of privacy violation?" _

_ "Is that a fact? Now this little item is particularly designed for brushing the wings--" _

_ At that point, I knocked him down and punched him into insensibility with my feet. Then I summoned the police. To my surprise, they arrested me instead of him._

_ I am writing this letter from jail. I do not like to ask my employers to get me out because, even though I am innocent, you know how a thing like this can leave a smudge on the record._

_ What shall I do? _

_ Anxiously yours, _

_ Fruzmus Bloxx _

* * * * *

"What should he do?" Tarb asked, handing Stet the paper. "Or is the question academic by now? The letter's five days old."

Stet sighed. "I'll find out whether the consulate has been notified. Native police usually do that, you know. Very thoughtful fellows. If this Bloxx hasn't been bailed out already, I'll see that he is."

"But how will we answer his letter? Advise him to sue for false arrest?"

Stet smiled. "But he has no grounds for false arrest. He is guilty of assault. The native was entirely within his rights in trying to sell him a brush. Now--" he put out a foot--"brace yourself. Privacy violation is not a crime on Terra. It is perfectly legal. In fact, it does not exist as such!"

At that point, everything went maroon.

When Tarb came to, she found herself lying upon Drosmig's desk. A skin-faced native woman was offering her water and clucking.

"Are you all right, Tarb--Miss Morfatch?" Stet demanded anxiously.

"Yes. I--I think so," she murmured, raising herself to a crouch.

"Better ... have died," Drosmig groaned from his perch. "Fate worse ... death ... awaits you."

Tarb tried to smile. "Sorry to have been so much trouble." She stuck out her tongue at both Stet and the native.

The woman drew in her breath.

"Miss Morfatch," Stet reminded Tarb, "sticking out the tongue is not an apology on Terra; it is an insult. Fortunately, Miss Snow happens to be perhaps the only Terran who would not be offended. She has become thoroughly acquainted with us and our odd little customs. She even--" he beamed at the Terran female--"has learned to speak our language."

"Hail to thee, O visitor from the stars," Miss Snow said in Fizbian. "May thy sojourn upon Earth be an incessant delight and may peace and plenty shower their gifts in abundance upon thee."

Tarb put her hand to her aching head. "I'm very glad to meet you," she said, glad she did not have to get up to make the ritual _entrechats_.

"Miss Snow is my right foot," Stet said, "but I'm going to be noble and let her act as your secretary until you can learn to operate a typewriter."

"Secretary? Typewriter?"

"Well, you see, there are no scriptos or superscriptos on Earth and we can't import any from Home because the natives--" Miss Snow smiled--"don't have the right kind of power here to run psychic installations. All prosifying has to be done directly on prosifying machines or--" he paused--"by foot."

"Catch her!" Miss Snow exclaimed in Terran.

Everything had gone maroon for Tarb again. As she fell, she could hear a sudden thump. It was, she later discovered, Drosmig falling off his perch again--the result of insecure grip, she was given to understand, rather than excessive empathy.

* * * * *

"I didn't mean, of course, to give you the impression that we actually produce the individual copies of the papers ourselves," Stet explained over the dinner table that night. "We have native printers who do that. They've turned out some really remarkable Fizbian type fonts." "Very clever of them," Tarb said, knowing that was what she was expected to say. She glanced around the restaurant. In their low-cut evening garments, the Terrestrial females looked much less Fizboid than they had during the day. All that naked-looking skin; one would think they'd want to cover it. Probably they were sick with jealousy of her beautiful rose-colored down--what they could see of it, anyway.

"Of course, our real problem is getting proofreaders. The proofing machines won't operate here either, of course, and so we need human personnel. But what Fizbian would do such degrading work? We had thought of convict labor, but--"

"Why mustn't I take off my wrap?" Tarb interrupted. "No one else is wearing one."

Stet coughed. "You'll feel much less self-conscious about your wings if you keep it on. And try not to use your feet so conspicuously. I'm sure everyone understands you need them to eat with, but--"

"But I'm not in the least self-conscious about my wings. On Fizbus, they were considered rather nice-looking, if I do say so myself."

"It's better," he said firmly, "not to emphasize the differences between the natives and ourselves. You didn't object to wearing a Terrestrial costume, did you?"

"No, I realize I must make some concessions to native prudery, but--"

"Matter of fact, I've been thinking it would be a good idea for you to wear a stole or a cape or something in the daytime when you go to and from the office. You wouldn't want to make yourself or the _Times_ conspicuous, I'm sure.... No, waiter, no coffee. We'll take champagne."

"I want to try coffee," Tarb said mutinously. "Champagne! You'd think I was a fledgling, giving me that bubbly stuff!"

He looked at her. "Now don't be silly, Miss Morfatch ... Tarb. I can't let you indulge in such rash experiments. You realize I am responsible for you."

Tarb muttered darkly into her _coupe maison_.

Stet raised his eyebrows. "What did you say?"

"I was only wondering whether you'd remembered to check on whether that young man--Bloxx--ever did get out of jail."

Stet snapped his toes. "Glad you reminded me. Completely slipped my mind. Let's go and see what happened to him, shall we?"

* * * * *

As they rose to leave, a dumpy Earthwoman rushed up to them, enthusiastically babbling in Terran. Seizing Tarb's foot, she clung to it before the Fizbian girl could do anything to prevent her. Tarb had to spread her wings wide to retain her balance. Her cloak flew off and an

adjoining table of diners disappeared beneath it.

[Illustration]

Stet and the headwaiter rushed to the rescue with profuse apologies, Stet's crest undulating as if it concealed a nest of snakes. But Tarb was too much frightened to be calmed.

"Is this a hostile attack?" she shrieked frantically at Stet. "Because the handbook never said shaking feet was an Earth custom!"

"No, no, she's a friend!" Stet yelled, leaving the diners still struggling with the cloak as he sped back to her. "And shaking feet isn't an Earth custom; she thinks it's a Fizbian one. You see.... Oh, hell, never mind--I'll explain the whole thing to you later. But she's just greeting you, trying to put you at your ease. It's Belinda Romney, a very important Terrestrial. She owns the Solar Press--you must have heard of it even on Fizbus--biggest news service on the planet. Absolutely wouldn't do to offend her. Mrs. Romney, may I present Miss Morfatch?"

The woman beamed and continued to gush endlessly.

"Tell her to let go my foot!" Tarb demanded. "It's getting so it feels carbonated."

He smiled deprecatingly. "Now, Tarb, we mustn't be rude--"

For the first time in her life, Tarb spoke Terran to a Terrestrial. She formed the words slowly and carefully: "Sorry we must leave, but we have to go to jail."

She looked to Stet for approval ... and didn't get it. He started to explain something quickly to the woman. Every time she'd heard him speak Terran, Tarb thought, he seemed to be introducing, explaining or apologizing.

It turned out that, through some oversight, the usually thoughtful Terran police department had neglected to inform the Fizbian consul that one of his people had been incarcerated, for the young man had already been tried, found guilty of assault plus contempt of court, and sentenced to pay a large fine. However, after Stet had given his version of the circumstances to a sympathetic judge, the sum was reduced to a nominal one, which the Times paid.

"But I don't see why you should have paid anything at all," Bloxx protested ungratefully. "I didn't do anything wrong. You should have made an issue of it."

"According to Earth laws, you did do wrong," Stet said wearily, "and

this is Earth. What's more, if we take the matter up, it will naturally get into print. You don't want your employers to hear about it, do you--even if you don't care about making Fizbians look ridiculous to Terrestrials?"

"I suppose I wouldn't like FizbEarth to find out," Bloxx conceded. "As it is, I'll have to do some fast explaining to account for my not having shown up for nearly a week. I'll say I caught some horrible Earth disease--that'll scare them so much, they'll probably beg me to take another week off. Though I do wish you fellows over at the _Times_ would answer your mail sooner. I'm a regular subscriber, you know."

* * * * *

"But the same kind of thing's going to happen over and over again, isn't it, Stet?" Tarb asked as a taxi took them back to the hotel in which most of the _Times_ staff was domiciled. "If privacy doesn't exist on Earth, it's bound to keep occurring."

"Eh?" Stet took his attention away from her toes with some difficulty. "Some Earth people like privacy, too, but they have to fight for it. Violations aren't legally punishable--that's the only difference."

"Then surely the Terrestrials would understand about us, wouldn't they?" she asked eagerly. "If they knew how strongly we felt about privacy, maybe they wouldn't violate it--not as much, anyway. I'm sure they're not vicious, just ignorant. And you can't just keep on getting Fizbians out of jail each time they run up against the problem. It would be too expensive, for one thing."

"Don't worry," he said, pressing her toes. "I'll take care of the whole thing."

"An article in the paper wouldn't really help much," she persisted thoughtfully, "and I suppose you must have run at least one already. It would explain to the Fizbians that Terrestrials don't regard invasion of privacy as a crime, but it wouldn't tell the Terrestrials that Fizbians do. We'll have to think of--"

"You're surely not going to tell me how to run my paper on your first day here, are you?"

He tried to take the sting out of his words by twining his toes around hers, but she felt guilty. She had been presumptuous. Probably there were lots of things she couldn't understand yet--like why she shouldn't polish her eyeballs in public. Stet had finally explained to her that, while Terrestrial women did make up in public, they didn't scour their irises, ever, and would be startled and horrified to see someone else doing so.

"But I was horrified to see them raking their feathers in public!" Tarb had contended.

"Combing their hair, my dear. And why not? This is their planet."

That was always his answer. _I wonder_, she speculated, _whether he would expect a Terrestrial visitor to Fizbus to fly ... because, after all, Fizbus is our planet._ But she didn't dare broach the question.

However, if it was presumptuous of her to make helpful suggestions the first day, it was more than presumptuous of Stet to ask her up to his rooms to see his collection of rare early twentieth-century Terrestrial milk bottles and other antiques. So she just told him courteously that she was tired and wanted to go to roost. And, since the hotel had a whole section fitted up to suit Fizbian requirements, she spent a more comfortable night than she had expected.

She awoke the next day full of enthusiasm and ready to start in on the great work at once. Although she might have been a little too forward the previous night, she knew, as she took a reassuring glance in the mirror, that Stet would forgive her.

* * * * *

In the office, she was, at first, somewhat self-conscious about Drosmig, who hung insecurely from his perch muttering to himself, but she soon forgot him in her preoccupation with duty. The first letter she picked up--although again oddly unlike the ones she'd read in the paper on Fizbus--seemed so simple that she felt she would have no difficulty in answering it all by herself:

Heidelberg

Dear Senbot Drosmig:

I am a professor of Fizbian History at a local university. Since my salary is a small one, owing to the small esteem in which the natives hold culture, I must economize wherever I can in order to make both ends meet. Accordingly, I do my own cooking and shop at the self-service supermarket around the corner, where I have found that prices are lower than in the service groceries and the food no worse.

However, the manager and a number of the customers have objected to my shopping with my feet. They don't so much mind my taking packages off the shelves with them, but they have been quite vociferous on the subject of my pinching the fruit with my toes. Unripe fruit, however, makes me ill. What shall I do?

Sincerely yours,

Grez B'Groot

Tarb dictated an unhesitating reply:

Dear Professor B'Groot:

Why don't you explain to the manager of the store that Fizbians have wings and feet rather than arms and hands?

I'm sure his attitude and the attitudes of his customers will change when they learn that your pinching the fruit with your feet is not mere pedagogical eccentricity, but the regular practice on our planet. Point out to him that your feet are covered and, therefore, more sanitary than the bare hands of his other customers.

And always put on clean socks before you go shopping.

Helpfully yours,

Senbot Drosmig

Miss Snow raised pale eyebrows.

"Is something wrong?" Tarb asked anxiously. "Should I have put in that bit about work, study, meditate? It seems inappropriate somehow."

"Oh, no, not that. It's just that your letter--well, violates Mr. Zarnon's precept that, in Rome, one must do as the Romans do."

"But this isn't Rome," Tarb replied, bewildered. "It's New York."

"He didn't make the saying up," Miss Snow replied testily. "It's a Terrestrial proverb."

"Oh," Tarb said.

She resented this creature's trying to tell her how to do her job. On the other hand, Tarb was wise enough to realize that Miss Snow, unpleasant though she might be, probably did know Stet well enough to be able to predict his reactions.

So Tarb not only was reluctant to show Stet what she had already done, but hesitated about answering another and even more urgent letter that had just been brought in by special messenger. She tried to compromise by submitting the letters to Drosmig--for, technically speaking, it was he who was her immediate superior--but he merely groaned, "Tell 'em all to drop dead," from his perch and refused to open his eyes.

In the end, Tarb had to take the letters to Stet's office. Miss Snow trailed along behind her, uninvited. And, since this was a place of business, Tarb could not claim a privacy violation. Even if it weren't a place of business, she remembered, she couldn't--not here on Earth. Advanced spirituality, hah!

Advanced pain in the pinions!

Stet read the first letter and her answer smilingly. "Excellent, Tarb--" her hearts leaped--"for a first try, but I'd like to suggest a few changes, if I may."

"Well, of course," she said, pretending not to notice the smirk on Miss Snow's face.

"Just write this Professor B'Goot that he should do his shopping at a grocery that offers service and practice his economies elsewhere. A professor, of all people, is expected to uphold the dignity of his own race--the idea, sneering at a culture that was thousands of years old when we were still building nests! Terrestrials couldn't possibly have any respect for him if they saw him prodding kumquats with his toes."

"It's no sillier than writing with one's vestigial wings!" Tarb blazed.

"Well!" Miss Snow exclaimed in Terran. "Well, _really_!"

Tarb started to stick out her tongue, then remembered. "I didn't mean to offend you, Miss Snow. I know it's your custom. But wouldn't you understand if I typewrote with my feet?"

Miss Snow tittered.

"If you want the honest truth, hon, it would make you look like a feathered monkey."

"If you want the honest truth about what you look like to me, dearie--it's a plucked chicken!"

"Tarb, I think you should apologize to Miss Snow!"

"All right!" Tarb stuck out her tongue. Miss Snow promptly thrust out hers in return.

"Ladies, ladies!" Stet cried. "I think there has been a slight confusion of folkways!" He quickly changed the subject. "Is that another letter you have there, Tarb?"

"Yes, but I didn't try to answer it. I thought you'd better have a look at it first, since Miss Snow didn't seem to think much of the job I did with the other one."

"Miss Snow always has the _Times'_ welfare at heart," Stet remarked ambiguously, and read:

Chicago

Dear Senbot Drosmig:

I am employed as translator by the extraterrestrial division of Burns and Deerhart, Inc., the well-known interstellar mail-order house. As the company employs no other Fizbians and our offices are situated in a small rural community where no others of our race reside, I find myself rather lonely. Moreover, being a bachelor, with neither chick nor child on Fizbus, I have nothing to look forward to upon my return to the Home Planet some day.

Accordingly, I decided to adopt a child to cheer my declining years. I dispatched an interstellargram to a reliable orphanage on Fizbus, outlining my hopes and requirements in some detail. After they had satisfied themselves as to my income, strength of character, etc., they sent me a fatherless and motherless egg in cold storage, which I was supposed to hatch upon arrival.

However, when the egg came to Earth, it was impounded by Customs. They say it is forbidden to import extrasolar eggs. I have tried to explain to them that it is not at all a question of importation but of adoption; however, they cannot or will not understand.

Please tell me what to do. I fear that they may not be keeping the egg at the correct Fizbian freezing point--which, as you know, is a good deal lower than Earth's. The fledgling may hatch by itself and receive a traumatic shock that might very well damage its entire psyche permanently.

Frantically yours,

Glibmus Gluyt

"Oh, for the stars' sake!" Stet exploded. "This is really too much! Viz our consul, Miss Snow. That egg must go back to Fizbus at once, before any Terrestrials hear of it! And I must notify the government back on the Home Planet to keep a close check on all egg shipments. Something like this must certainly not occur again."

"Why shouldn't the Terrestrials hear of it?" Tarb asked, outraged. "And I think it's mean of you to send back a poor little orphan egg like that when it has a chance of getting a good home."

"An egg!" Miss Snow repeated incredulously. "You mean you really...?" She gave me one mad little hoot of laughter and then stopped and

strangled slightly. Her face turned purple in her efforts to restrain mirth. _Really_, Tarb thought, _she looks so much better that color_.

Stet's crest twitched violently. "I hope--" he began. "I do hope you will keep this ... knowledge to yourself, Miss Snow."

"But of course," she assured him, calming down. "I'm dreadfully sorry I was so rude. Naturally I wouldn't dream of telling a soul, Mr. Zarnon. You can trust me."

"I'm sure I can, Miss Snow."

Tarb almost choked with indignation. "You mean you've been keeping the facts of our life from Terrestrials? As if they were fledglings ... no, even fledglings are told these days."

"One could hardly blame him for it, Miss Morfatch," Miss Snow said. "You wouldn't want people to know that Fizbians laid eggs, would you?"

"And why not?"

"Tarb," Stet intervened, "you don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, don't I? You're ashamed of the fact that we bear our children in a clean, decent, honorable way instead of--" She stopped. "I'm being as bad as you two are. Probably the Terrestrials' way of reproduction doesn't seem dirty to them--but, since they do reproduce _that_ way, they could scarcely find our way objectionable!"

"Tarb, that's not how a young girl should talk!"

"Oh, go lay an egg!" she said, knowing that she had overstepped the limits of propriety, but unable to let him get away with that. "I hope to be a wife and mother some day," she added, "and I only hope that when that time comes, I'll be able to lay good eggs."

"Miss Morfatch," Stet said, keeping control of his temper with a visible effort, "that will be enough from you. If common decency doesn't restrain you, please remember that I am your employer and that _I_ set the policies on _my_ paper. You'll do what you're told and keep a civil tongue in your head or you'll be sent back to Fizbus. Do I make myself clear?"

"You do, indeed," Tarb said. How could she ever have thought he was charming and handsome? Well, perhaps he still was handsome, but fine feathers do not make fine deeds. And, if it came to that, it wasn't his paper.

"We have the same thing on Terra," Miss Snow murmured sympathetically to Stet. "These young whippersnappers think they can start in running the

paper the very first day. Why, Belinda Romney herself--she's a distant cousin of mine, you know--told me--"

"Miss Snow," Tarb said, "I hope for the sake of Earth that you are not a typical example of the Terrestrial species."

"And you, hon," Miss Snow retorted, "don't belong on a paper, but in a chicken coop."

"Ladies!" Stet said helplessly. "Women," he muttered, "certainly do not belong on a newspaper. Matter of fact, they don't belong anywhere; their place is in the home only because there's nowhere else to put them."

Both females glared at him.

* * * * *

During the next fortnight, Tarb gained fluency in Terran and also learned to operate a Terrestrial typewriter equipped with Fizbian type--mostly so that she could dispense with the services of the invaluable Miss Snow. She didn't like typing, though--it chipped her toenails and her temper. Besides, Drosmig kept complaining that the noise prevented him from sleeping and she preferred him to sleep rather than hang there making irrelevant and, sometimes, unpleasantly relevant remarks.

"Longing for the old scripto, eh?" one of the cameramen smiled as he lounged in the open doorway of her office. Although she was fond of fresh air, Tarb realized that she would have to keep the door shut from now on. Too many of the younger members of the staff kept booing at her as they passed, and now they had formed the habit of dropping in to offer her advice, encouragement and invitations to meals. At first, the attention had pleased her--but now she was much too busy to be bothered; she was going to turn out acceptable answers to those letters or die trying.

"Well, if the power can't be converted, it can't," she said grimly.

"Griblo, I do wish you'd be a dear and flutter off. I--"

He snorted. "Who says the power can't be converted? Stet, huh?"

She took her feet off the keys and looked at him. "Why do you say 'Stet' that way?"

"Because that's a lot of birdseed he gives you about not being able to convert Earth power. Could be done all right, but he and the consul have it all fixed up to keep Fizbian technology off the planet. Consul's probably being paid off by the International Association of Manufacturers and Stet's in it for the preservation of indigenous culture--and maybe a little cash, too. After all, those rare antique

collections of his cost money."

"I don't believe it!" Tarb snapped. "Griblo, please--I have so much work to get through!"

"Okay, chick, but I warn you, you're going to have your bright-eyed illusions shattered. Why don't you wake up to the truth about Stet? What you should do is maybe eschew the society of all journalists entirely, and a sordid lot they are, and devote yourself to photographers--splendid fellows, all."

"Please shut the door behind you!"

The door slammed.

Tarb gazed disconsolately at the letter before her. Would she ever be able to answer letters to Stet's satisfaction? The purpose of the whole column was service--but did she and Stet mean the same thing by the same word? Or, if they did, whom was Stet serving?

She was paying too much attention to Griblo's idle remarks. Obviously he was a sorehead--had some kind of grudge against Stet. Perhaps Stet was a bit too autocratic, perhaps he had even gone native to some extent, but you couldn't say anything worse about him than that. All in all, he wasn't a bad bird and she mustn't let herself be influenced by rumormongers like Griblo.

* * * *

Tarb got up and took the letter to Stet. He was in his office dictating to Miss Snow. _After all_, Tarb could not repress the ugly thought, _why should he care about the scriptos? He'll never have to use a typewriter._

And he was perfectly nice about being interrupted. The only thing he didn't like was being contradicted. _I'm getting bitter_, she told herself in surprise. _And at my age, too. I wonder what I'll be like when I'm old._

This thought alarmed her and so she smiled very sweetly at Stet as she murmured, "Would you mind reading this?" and gave him the letter.

"Run into another little snag, eh?" he said affably, giving her foot a gentle pat with his. "Well, let's see what we can do about it."

Montreal

Dear Senbot Drosmig:

_I am a chef at the Cafe Inter-stellaire, which, as everyone knows,

is one of the most chic eating establishments on this not very chic planet. During my spare moments, I am a great amateur of the local form of entertainment known as television. I am especially fascinated by the native actress Ingeborg Swedenborg, who, in spite of being a Terran, compares most favorably with our own Fizbian footlight favorites._

The other day, while I am in the kitchen engaged in preparing the ragout celeste à la fizbe for which I am justly celebrated on nine planets, I hear a stir outside in the dining room. I strain my ears. I hear the cry, "It is Ingeborg Swedenborg!"

I cannot help myself. I rush to the doorway. There, behold, the incomparable Ingeborg herself! She follows the headwaiter to a choice table. She is even more ravishing in real life than on the screen. On her, it does not matter that she has no feathers save on the head--even skin looks good. Overcome by involuntary ardor, I boo at her. Whereupon I am violently assailed by a powerfully built native whom I have not previously noticed to be escorting her.

I am rescued before he can do me any permanent damage, though, if you wish the truth, it will be a long time before I can fly again. However, I am given notice by the cold-hearted management. Now I am without a job. And what is more, if on this planet one is not permitted to express one's instinctive and natural admiration for a beautiful woman, then all I have to say is that it is a lousy planet and I wiggle my toes at it. How do I go about getting deported?

Impatiently yours,

Rajois Sludd

"Oh, I suppose it serves him right," Tarb said quickly, before Stet could comment, "but don't you think it would be a good idea if the _Times_ got up a Fizbian-Terrestrial handbook of its own? It's the only solution that I can see. The regular one, I recognize now, is more than inadequate, with all that spiritual gup--" Miss Snow drew in her breath sharply--"and not much else. All these problems are bound to arise again and again. Frankly speaking, Stet, your solutions only take care of the individual cases; they don't establish a sound intercultural basis."

He grunted.

"What's more," she went on eagerly, "we could not only give copies to every Fizbian planning to visit Earth, but also print copies in Terran for Terrestrials who are interested in learning more about Fizbus and the Fizbians. In fact, all Terrans who come in contact with us should have the book. It would help both races to understand each other so much better and--"

"Unnecessary!" Stet snapped, so violently that she stopped with her mouth open. "The standard handbook is more than adequate. Whatever limitations it may have are deliberate. Setting down in cold print all that ... stuff you want to have included would make a point of things we prefer not to stress. I wouldn't want to have the Terrestrials humor me as if I were a fledgling or a foreigner."

He leaped out of his chair and paced up and down the office. One would think he had forgotten he ever could fly.

"But you are a foreigner, Stet," Tarb said gently. "No matter what you do or say, Terrestrials and Fizbians are--well, worlds apart."

"Spiritually, I am much closer to the Terrestrials than--but you wouldn't understand." He and Miss Snow nodded sympathetically at each other. "And you might be interested to know that I happen to be the author of all that 'spiritual gup.' I wrote the handbook--as a service to Fizbus, I might point out. I wasn't paid for it."

"Oh, dear!" Tarb said. "Oh, _dear_! I really and truly am sorry, Stet."

He brushed her apologies aside. "Answer that letter. Ignore the question about deportation entirely." He ran a foot through his crest. "Just tell the fellow to see our personnel manager. We could use a chef in the company dining room. Haven't tasted a decent celestial ragout--at a price I could afford--since I left Fizbus."

"Would you want me to print that reply in the column?" she asked. "If you lose your job because you're unfamiliar with Terrestrial customs, come to the _Times_. We'll give you another job at a much lower salary."

"Of course not! Send your answer directly to him. You don't think we put any of those letters you've been answering in the column, do you? Or any that come in at all, for that matter. I have to write all the letters that are printed--and answer them myself."

"I should have recognized the style," Tarb said. "So this is the service the _Times_ offers to its subscribers. Nothing that would be of help. Nothing that could prevent other Fizbians from making the same mistake. Nothing that could be controversial. Nothing that would help Terrestrials to understand us. Nothing, in short, but a lot of birdseed!"

"Impertinence!" Miss Snow remarked. "You shouldn't let her talk to you like that, Mr. Zarnon."

"Tarb!" Stet roared, casting an impatient glance at Miss Snow. "How dare you talk to me in that way? And all this is none of your business,

anyway."

"I'm a Fizbian," she stated, "and it certainly is my business. I'm not ashamed of having wings. I'm proud of them and sorry for people who don't have them. And, by the stars, I'm going to fly. If skirts are improper to wear for flying, then I can wear slacks. I saw them in a Terrestrial fashion magazine and they're perfectly respectable."

"Not for working hours," Miss Snow sniffed.

"I have no intention of flying during working hours," Tarb snapped back. "Even you should be able to see that the ceiling's much too low."

Stet ran a foot through his crest again. "I hate to say this, Tarb, but I don't feel you're the right person for this job. You mean well, I'm sure, but you're too--too inflexible."

"You mean I have principles," she retorted, "and you don't." Which wasn't entirely true; he had principles--it was just that they were unprincipled.

"That will be enough, Tarb," he said sternly. "You'd better go now while I think this over. I'd hate to send you back to Fizbus, because I'd--well, I'd miss you. On the other hand...."

Tarb went back to her office and drafted a long interstel to a cousin on Fizbus, explaining what she would like for a birthday present. "And send it special delivery," she concluded, "because I am having an urgent and early birthday."

* * * * *

"Tarb Morfatch!" Stet howled, a few months later. "What on Earth are you doing?"

"Dictating into my scripto," Tarb said cheerfully. "Some of the boys from the print shop helped fix it up for me. They were very nice about it, too, considering that the superscriptos will probably throw them out of work. You know, Stet, Terrestrials can be quite decent people."

"Where did you get that scripto?"

"Cousin Mylfis sent it to me for my birthday. I must have complained about wearing out my claws on a typewriter and he didn't understand that scriptos won't work on Earth. Only they do." She beamed at her employer. "All it needed was a transformer. I guess you're just not mechanically minded, Stet."

He clenched his feet. "Tarb, Terrestrials aren't ready for our technology. You've done a very unwise thing in having that scripto sent

to you. And I've done a very unwise thing in keeping you here against my better judgment."

"Maybe the Terrestrials aren't ready," she said, ignoring his last remark, "but I'm not going to wear my feet to the bone if I can get a gadget that'll do the same thing with no expenditure of physical energy." She placed a foot on his. "I don't see how a thing like this could possibly corrupt the Terrestrials, Stet. It's made a better, brighter girl out of me already."

"Hear, hear!" said Drosmig hoarsely from his perch.

"Shut up, Senbot. You just don't understand, Tarb. If you'll only--"

"But I'm afraid I do understand, Stet. And I won't send my scripto back."

"May I come in?" Miss Snow tapped lightly on the door frame. "Is what I hear true?"

"About the scripto?" Tarb asked. "It certainly is. All you have to do is talk into it and the words appear on the paper. Guess that makes you obsolete, doesn't it, Miss Snow?"

"And high time, too," commented Drosmig. "Never liked the old biddy."

"Senbot..." Stet began, and stopped. "Oh, what's the use trying to talk reasonably to either of you! Tarb, come back to my office with me."

She could not refuse and so she followed. Miss Snow, torn between curiosity and the scripto, hesitated and then made after them.

"I've decided to take you off the column--for this morning, anyway--and send you on an outside assignment," Stet told Tarb. "The consul's wife is coming to Earth today. Once she heard there was another woman on Terra, nothing could stop her. Consul seems to think it's my fault, too," he added moodily. "Won't believe I had nothing to do with hiring you. I told the Home Office not to send a woman, that she'd disrupt the office, and you sure as hell have."

"But I thought you said in your letters that you were doing everything in your power to bring Fizbian womenfolk to their men on Terra!" Tarb pointed out malevolently.

"Yes," he confessed. "We must please our readers. You know that. Anyway, all that's irrelevant right now. What I want you to do is go meet the consul's wife. Nice touch, having the only other Fizbian woman here be the one to interview her. Human interest angle for the Terrestrial papers. Shouldn't be surprised if Solar Press picked it up--they like items of that kind for fillers. Take Griblo along with you and make sure

he has film in his camera this time."

"Yes, sir," Tarb said. "Anything you say, sir."

He pretended not to notice her sarcasm. "I have a list of the questions you should ask her." He fixed her with his eye. "You stick to them, do you hear me? I don't want anything controversial." He rummaged among the papers on his desk. "I know I had it half an hour ago. Sit down, will you, Tarb? Stop hopping around."

"If I can't have a perch, I want a stool," Tarb said. "This is a private office and I think it's a gross affectation for you to have those silly, uncomfortable chairs in it."

"If you would have your wings clipped like Mr. Zarnon's--" Miss Snow began before Stet could stop her.

"Stet, you _didn't_!"

His crest thrashed back and forth. "They'll grow back again and it's so much more convenient this way. After all, I can't use them here and I do have to associate with Terrestrials and use their equipment. The consul has had his wings clipped also and so have several of our more prominent industrialists--"

"Oh, _Stet_!" Tarb wailed. "I was beginning to think some pretty hard things about you, but I wouldn't ever have dreamed you'd do anything as awful as that!"

"Why should I have to apologize to you?" he raged. "Who do you think you are, anyway? You're an incompetent little fool. I should have fired you that first day. I've let you get away with so much only because you have a pretty face. You've only been on Earth a couple of months; how can you presume to think you know what's good and what's bad for the Fizbians here?"

"I may not know what's good," she retorted, "but I certainly do know what's bad. And that's you, Stet--you and everything you stand for. You not only don't have the courage of your convictions, you don't even have any convictions. You're ashamed of being a Fizbian, ashamed of anything that makes Fizbians different from Terrestrials, even if it's something better, something that most Terrans would like to have. You're a damned hypocrite, Stet Zarnon, that's what you are--professing to help our people when actually you're hurting them by trying to force them into the mold of an alien species."

She brushed back her crest. "I take it I'm fired," she said more quietly. "Do you want me to interview the consul's wife first or leave right away?"

It took Stet a moment to bring his voice under control. "Interview her first. We'll talk this over when you get back."

* * * *

It was pleasant to be away from the office, she thought as the taxi pulled toward the airfield, and doing wingwork again, even if it proved to be the first and last time on this planet. Griblo sat hunched in a corner of the seat, too preoccupied with the camera, which, even after two years, he hadn't fully mastered, to pay attention to her.

Outside, it was raining, the kind of thin drizzle that, on Fizbus or Earth, could go on for days. Tarb had brought along the native umbrella she had purchased in the hotel gift shop--a delightful contraption that was supposed to keep off the rain and didn't, and was supposed to collapse and did, but at the wrong moments. She planned to take it back with her when she returned to Fizbus. Approved souvenir or not, it was the same beautiful purple as her eyes. And, besides, who had made the ruling about approved souvenirs? Stet, of course.

"No reason why we couldn't have autofax brought from Home," Griblo suddenly grumbled.

Tarb pulled herself back from her thoughts. "I suppose Stet wouldn't let you," she said. "But now that one script's here," she went on somewhat complacently, "he'll have to--"

"Keep this planet charming and unspoiled, he says," Griblo interrupted ungratefully. "Its spiritual values will be corrupted by too much contact with a crass advanced technology. And, of course, he's got the local camera manufacturers solidly behind him. I wonder whether they advertise in the _Times_ because he helps keep autofax off Terra or whether he keeps the autofax off Terra because they advertise in the _Times_."

"But what does he care about advertising? He may talk as if he owned the _Times_, but he doesn't."

Griblo gave a nasty laugh. "No, he doesn't, but if the Terran edition didn't show a profit, it'd fold quicker than you can flip your wings and he'd have to go back to nasty old up-to-date Fizbus as a lowly sub-editor. And he wouldn't like that one bit. Our Stet, as you may have noticed, is fond of running things to suit himself."

"But Mr. Grupe told me that the _Times_ isn't interested in money. It's running this edition of the paper only as a service to--oh, I suppose all that was a lot of birdseed, too!"

"Grupe!" Griblo snorted. "The sanctimonious old buzzard! He's a big stockholder on the paper. Bet you didn't know that, did you? All they're

out for is money. Fizbian money, Terrestrial money--so long as it's cash."

"Tell me, Griblo," Tarb asked, "what does 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do' mean?"

Griblo grinned sourly. "Stet's favorite motto." He moved along the seat closer to her. "I'll tell you what it means, chicken. When on Earth, don't be a Fizbian."

* * * *

The consul's wife, an old mauve creature, did not seem overpleased to see Tarb, since the younger, prettier Fizbian definitely took the spotlight away from her. The press had, of course, seen Tarb before, but at that time they hadn't been able to communicate directly with her and they didn't, she now found out, think nearly as much of Stet as he did of them.

Tarb couldn't attempt to deviate much from Stet's questions, for the consul's wife was not very cooperative and the consul himself watched both women narrowly. He was a good friend of Stet's, Tarb knew, and apparently Stet had taken the other man into his confidence.

When the interviews were over and the consular party had left, Tarb remained to chat with the Terrestrial journalists. Despite Griblo's worried objections, she joined them in the Moonfield Restaurant, where she daringly partook of a cup of coffee and then another and another.

After that, things weren't very clear. She dimly remembered the other reporters assuring her that she shouldn't disfigure her lovely wings with a stole ... and then pirouetting in the air over the bar to prolonged applause ... and then she was in the taxi again with Griblo shaking her.

"Wake up, Tarb--we're almost at the office! Stet'll have me plucked for this!"

Tarb sat up and pushed her crest out of her eyes. The sky was growing dark. They must have been gone a long time.

"I'll never hear the end of this," Griblo moaned. "Why, if only he could get someone to fill my place, Stet would fire me like a shot! Not that I wouldn't quit if I could get another job."

"Oh, it'll be mostly me he'll be mad at." Tarb pulled out her compact. Stet had warned her not to polish her eyeballs in public, but the ground with him! Her head hurt. And her feathers, she saw in the mirror, had turned almost beige. She looked horrible. She felt horrible. And Stet would probably think she was horrible.

"When Stet's mad," Griblo prophesied darkly, "he's mad at _everybody_!"

And Stet _was_ mad. He was waiting in the newsroom, his emerald-blue eyes blazing as if he had not only polished but lacquered them.

"What's the idea of taking six hours to cover a simple story!" he shouted as soon as the door began to open. "Aside from the trivial matter of a deadline to be met--Griblo, _where's Tarb_? Nothing's happened to her, has it?"

"Naaah," Griblo said, unslinging his camera. "She took a short cut, only she got held up by a terrace. Snagged her umbrella on it, I believe. I heard her yelling when I was waiting for the elevator; I didn't know nice girls knew language like that. She should be up any minute now.... There she is."

He pointed to a window, through which the lissome form of the young feature writer could be seen, tapping on the glass in order to attract attention.

[Illustration]

"Somebody better open it for her," the cameraman suggested. "Probably not meant to open from the outside. Not many people come in that way, I guess."

* * * * *

Open-mouthed, the whole newsroom stared at the window. Finally the Copy Editor got up and let a dripping Tarb in.

"Nearly thought I wouldn't make it," she observed, shaking herself in a flurry of wet pink feathers. The rest of the staff ducked, most of them too late. "Umbrella didn't do much good," she continued, closing it. It left a little puddle on the rug. "My wings got soaked right away." She tossed her wet crest out of her eyes. "Golly, but it's good to fly again. Haven't done it for months, but it seems like years." Her eye caught Miss Snow's. "You don't know what you're missing!"

"Tarb," Stet thundered, "you've been drinking coffee! _Griblo!_" But the cameraman had nimbly sought sanctuary in the dark-room.

"You'd better go home, Tarb." When Stet's eye tufts met across his nose, he was downright ugly, she realized. "Griblo can give me the dope and I'll write up the story myself. I can fill it out with canned copy. And you and I will discuss this situation in the morning."

"Won't go home when there's work to be done. Duty calls me." Giving a brief and quite recognizable imitation of a Terrestrial trumpet, Tarb

stalked down the corridor to her office.

Drosmig looked up from his perch, to which he was still miraculously clinging at that hour. "So it got you, too?... Sorry ... nice girl."

"It hasn't got me," Tarb replied, picking up a letter marked _Urgent_. "I've got it." She scanned the letter, then made hastily for Stet's office.

He sat drumming on his desk with the antique stainless steel spatula he used as a paperknife.

"Read this!" she demanded, thrusting the letter into his face. "Read this, you traitor--sacrificing our whole civilization to what's most expedient for you! Hypocrite! Cad!"

"Tarb, listen to me! I'm--"

"Read it!" She slapped the letter down in front of him. "Read it and see what you've done to us! Sure, we Fizbians keep to ourselves and so the only people who know anything about us are the ones who want to sell us brushes, while the people who want to help us don't know a damn thing about us and--"

"Oh, all right! I'll read it if you'll only keep quiet!" He turned the letter right-side up.

Johannesburg

Dear Senbot Drosmig:

I represent the Dzoglian Publishing Company, Inc., of which I know you have heard, since your paper has seen fit to give our books some of the most unjust reviews on record. However, be that as it may, I have opened an office on Earth with the laudable purpose of effecting an interchange of respective literatures, to see which Terrestrial books might most profitably be translated into Fizbian, and which of the authors on our own list might have potential appeal for the Earth reader.

Dealing with authors is, of course, a nerve-racking business and I soon found myself in dire need of mental treatment. What was my horror to find that this primitive, although charming, planet had no neurotones, no psychoscopes, not even any cerebrophones--in fact, no psychiatric machines at all! The very knowledge of this brought me several degrees closer to a breakdown.

_Perhaps I should have consulted you at this juncture, but I admit I was a bit of a snob. "What sort of advice can a mere journalist give me," I thought, "that I could not give myself?" So, more for

amusement than anything else, I determined to consult a native practitioner. "After all," I said to myself, "a good laugh is a step forward on the road to recovery."_

Accordingly, I went to see this native fellow. They work entirely without machines, I understand, using something like witchcraft. At the same time, I thought I might pick up some material for a jolly little book on primitive customs which I could get some unknown writer to throw together inexpensively. Strong human interest items like that always have great reader-appeal.

The native chap--doctor, he calls himself--was most cordial, which he should have been at the price I was paying him. One thing I must say about these natives--backward they may be, but they have a very shrewd commercial sense. You can't even imagine the trouble I had getting those authors to sign even remotely reasonable contracts ... which in part accounts for my mental disturbance, I suppose.

Well, anyway, I handed the native a privacy waiver carefully filled out in Terran. He took it, smiled and said, "We'll discuss this afterward. My contact lenses have disappeared; I suppose one of my patients has stolen them again. Can't see a thing without them."

So we sat down and had a bit of a chat. He seemed remarkably intelligent for a native; never interrupted me once.

"You are definitely in great trouble," he told me when I'd finished. "You need to be psycho-analyzed."

"Good, good," I said. "I see I've come to the right shop."

"Now just lie down and make yourself comfortable."

"Lie down?" I repeated, puzzled. I have an excellent command of Terran, but every now and then an idiom will throw me. "I tell the truth, sir, and when I am required by force of circumstances to lie, I lie up."

"No," he said, "not that kind of lying. You know, the kind you do at night when you go to sleep."

"Oh, I get you," I said idiomatically. Without further ado, I flung off my ulster and flew up to a thingummy hanging from the ceiling--chandelier, I believe, is the native term--flipped upside down, and hung from it by my toes. Wasn't the Presidential Perch, by any means, but it wasn't bad at all. "What do I do next?" I inquired affably.

_ "My dear fellow," the chap said, whipping out a notebook from the recesses of his costume, "how long have you had this delusion that you are a bird--or is it a bat?" _

_ "Sir," I said as haughtily as my position permitted, "I am neither a bird nor a bat. I am a Fizbian. Surely you have heard of Fizbians?" _

_ "Yes, yes, of course. They come from another country or planet or something. Frankly, politics is a bit outside my sphere. All I'm interested in is people--and Fizbians are people, aren't they?" _

_ "Yes, certainly. If anything, it's you who.... Yes, they are people." _

_ "Well, tell me then, Mr. Liznig, when was it you first started thinking you were a bat or a bird?" _

_ I tried to control myself. "I am neither a bird nor a bat! I am a Fizbian! I have wings! See?" I fluttered them. _

_ He peered at me. "I wish I could," he said regretfully. "Without my glasses, though, I'm as blind as a bat--or a bird." _

_ Well, the long and the short of it is that the natives are planning to certify me as insane and incarcerate me, pending the doctor's decision as to whether my delusion is that I am a bird or a bat. They are using my privacy waiver as commitment papers. _

_ Save me, Senbot Drosmig, for I feel that if I have to wait for the doctor's glasses to be delivered, I shall indeed go mad. _

_ Distractedly yours, _

_ Tgos Liznig _

"I'll handle this myself," Stet said crisply. "I'll tell the consul to advise the Terran State Department that this man should be deported as an undesirable alien. That'll solve the problem neatly. We can't have this contaminating the pure stream of Terrestrial literature with--"

"But aren't you going to explain to them that he's perfectly sane?" Tarb gasped.

"No need to bother. He'll be grateful enough to get off the planet. Besides, how do I know he is perfectly sane?"

"Stet Zarnon, you're perfectly horrid!"

"And you, Tarb Morfatch, are disgustingly drunk. Now you go right home

and sleep it off. I know I was too harsh with you--my fault for letting you go out alone with Griblo in the first place when you've been here only a few months. Might have known those Terran journalists would lead you astray. Nice fellows, but irresponsible." He flicked out his tongue. "There, I've apologized. Now will you go home?"

"Home!" Tarb shrieked. "Home when there's work to be done and--"

"--and you're not going to be the one to do it. Tarb," he said, attempting to seize her foot, which she pulled away, "I was going to tell you tomorrow, but you might as well know tonight. I've taken you off the column for good. I have a better job for you."

She looked at him. "A better job? Are you being sarcastic? What as?"

"As my wife." He got up and came over to her. She stood still, almost stunned. "That solves the whole problem tidily. An office is no place for you, darling--you're really a simple home-girl at heart. Newspaper work is too strenuous for you; it upsets you and makes you nervous and irritable. I want you to stay home and take care of our house and hatch our eggs--unostentatiously, of course."

"Why, you--" she spluttered.

He put his foot over her mouth. "Don't give me your answer now. You're in no condition to think. Tell me tomorrow."

* * * * *

It rained all night and continued on into the morning. Tarb's head ached, but she had to make an appearance at the office. First she vizzed an acquaintance she had made the day before; then she took her umbrella and set forth.

As she kicked open the door to the newsroom, all sound ceased. Voices stopped abruptly. Typewriters halted in mid-click. Even the roar of the presses downstairs suddenly seemed to mute. Every head turned to look at Tarb.

Humph, she thought, removing her plastic oversocks, _so suppose I was a little oblique yesterday. They needn't stare at me. They never stare at Drosmig. Just because I'm a woman, I suppose!_ The gate crashed loudly behind her.

"Oh, Miss Morfatch," Miss Snow called. "Mr. Zarnon said he wanted to see you as soon as you came in. It's urgent." And she giggled.

"Really?" Tarb said. "Well, he'll just have to wait until I've wrung out my wings." Sooner or later, she would have to face Stet, but she wanted to put it off as long as possible.

She opened the door to her office and halted in amazement. For, seated on a stool behind the desk, haggard but vertical, was Senbot Drosmig, busily reading letters and blue-penciling comments on them with his feet.

"Good morning, my dear," he said, giving her a wan smile. "Surprised to see me functioning again, eh?"

"Well--yes." She opened her dripping umbrella mechanically and stood it in a corner. "How--"

"I realized last night that all that happened to you was my fault. You were my responsibility and I failed you."

"Oh, don't be melodramatic, Senbot. I wasn't your responsibility and you didn't fail me. Not that I'm not glad to see you up and doing again, but--"

"But I did fail you!" the aged journalist insisted. "And, in the same way, I failed my people. I shouldn't have given in. I should have fought Zarnon as you, my dear, tried to do. But it isn't too late!" The fire of the crusader lit up in his watery old eyes. "I can still fight him and his sacred crows--his Earthlings! If I have to, I can go over his head to Grupe. Grupe may not understand Stet's moral failings, but he certainly will comprehend his commercial ones. Grupe owns stock in other Fizbian enterprises besides the _Times_. Autofax, for example."

"Oh, Senbot!" Tarb wailed. "The whole thing's such an awful mess!"

"I don't think it'll be necessary to threaten that far," he comforted her. "Stet is no fool. He knows which side of his breadnut is peeled."

"I'm sure you'll do a wonderful job," she exclaimed, impulsively giving a ritual _entrechat_. "And I wish I could stay and help you, but...."

"I know, my dear."

"You do?" She was puzzled. "But how did the news get around so quickly?"

He shrugged. "The Terrestrial grapevine is almost as efficient as the Fizbian. Didn't you notice any change in the--ah--atmosphere when you came in?"

"Oh, was that the reason?" Tarb laughed merrily. "Somehow it never occurred to me that they could have heard so soon."

"But the morning editions have been out for hours."

The door to the office was flung open. Stet stormed in, bristling with a

most unloverlike rage.

"Miss Morfatch--" he waved a crumpled copy of the Terrestrial Tribune at her--"when I give an order, I expect to be obeyed! Didn't Miss Snow tell you to report directly to my office the instant you came in? Although that's a question I don't have to ask; I know Miss Snow, at least, is someone I can trust."

"I was coming to see you, Stet," Tarb said soothingly. "Right away."

"Oh, you were, were you? And have you seen this?" Stet fairly threw the paper at her. Smack in the middle of the front page was a picture of herself in full flight over the airfield bar. Not a very good picture, but what could you expect with Terrestrial equipment? When the autofax came, perhaps she would be done justice.

FIZBIAN NEWSHEN GIVES EARTH A FLUTTER

"Though No Mammal, I Pack a Lot of Uplift," Says
Beautiful Fizbian Gal Reporter

"I feel that you Terrans and we Fizbians can get along much better," lovely Tarb Morfatch, Fizbus Times feature writer, told her fellow-reporters yesterday at the Moonfield Restaurant, "if we learn to understand each other's differences as well as appreciate our similarities.

"With commerce between the two planets expanding as rapidly as it has been," Miss Morfatch went on, "it becomes increasingly important that we make sure there is no clash of mores between us. Where adaptation is impossible, we must both adjust. 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do' is an outmoded concept in the complex interstellar civilization of today. The Romans must learn to accept us as we are, and vice versa.

"Forgive me if I've offended you by my frankness," she said, sticking out her tongue in the charming gesture of apology that is acquiring such a vogue on Earth, Belinda Romney and many other socialites having enthusiastically adopted it, "but you've violated our privacy so many times, I feel I'm entitled to hurt your feelings just a teeny-weeny bit...."

"Those Terran journalists," Tarb said admiringly. "Never miss a trick, do they? Am I in all the other papers too, Stet? Same cheesecake?"

"You've made an ovulating circus out of us--that's what you've done!"

"Nonsense. Good strong human interest stuff; it'll make us lovable as chicks all over the planet. Gee--" she read on--"did I say all that while I was caffeinated? I ought to turn out some pretty terrific copy

sober."

"And to think you, the woman I had asked to make my wife, did this to me."

"Oh, that's all right, Stet," Tarb said without looking up from the paper. "I wasn't going to accept you, anyway."

"Good for you, Tarb," Drosmig approved.

"You're going back to Fizbus on the next liner--do you hear me?" Stet raged.

She smiled sunnily. "Oh, but I'm not, Stet. I'm going to stay right here on Earth. I like it. You might say the spiritual aura got me."

He snorted. "How can you possibly stay? You don't have an independent income and this is an expensive planet. Besides, I won't let you stay on Earth. I have considerable influence, you know!"

"Poor Stet." She smiled at him again. "I'm afraid the Fizbian press--the Fizbian consul even--are pretty small pullets beside the Solar Press Syndicate. You see, I came in this morning only to resign."

He stared at her.

"Yesterday," she informed him, "I was offered another position--as feature writer for the SP. I hadn't decided whether or not to accept when I reported back last evening, but you made up my mind for me, so I called them this morning and took the job. My work will be to explain Fizbians to Terrans and Terrans to Fizbians--as I wanted to do for the _Times_, Stet, only you wouldn't let me."

"It's no use saying anything to you about loyalty, I suppose?"

"None whatsoever," she said. "I owe the _Times_ no loyalty and I'm doing what I do out of loyalty to Fizbus ... plus, of course, a much higher salary."

"I'm glad for you, Tarb," Drosmig said sincerely.

"Be glad for yourself, Senbot, because Stet will have to let you conduct the column your way from now on. Either it'll supplement my work in the Terrestrial papers or he'll look like a fool. And you do hate looking like a fool, don't you, Stet?"

He didn't answer.

"Better give up, Stet." She turned to Drosmig. "Well, good-bye, Senbot--or, rather, so long. I'm sure we'll be seeing each other again."

Good-by, Stet. No hard feelings, I hope?"

He neither moved nor spoke.

"Well ... good-by, then," she said.

The door closed. Stet stared after her. The forgotten umbrella dripped forlornly in the corner.



A STORY OF THE VERE DE VERE.

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of **A Village Ophelia and Other Stories**
by Anne Reeve Aldrich

The landlord called it an apartment-house, the tenants called their three or four little closets of rooms, flats, and perhaps if you or I had chanced to be in West ---- Street, near the river, and had glanced up at the ugly red brick structure, with the impracticable fire-escape crawling up its front, like an ugly spider, we should have said it was a common tenement house.

Druse, however, had thought it, if a trifle dirty, a very magnificent and desirable dwelling. The entrance floor was tessellated with diamonds of blue and white; there was a row of little brass knobs and letter-boxes, with ill-written names or printed cards stuck askew in the openings above them. Druse did not guess their uses at first, how should she? She had never in all her fifteen years, been in the city before. How should one learn the ways of apartment-houses when one had lived always in a little gray, weather-beaten house, on the very outskirts of a straggling village in Eastern Connecticut?

It happened like this. One day, Tom, the fourth of the nine hungry and turbulent children, sent to the store on an errand, returned, bringing a letter. A letter, that was not a circular about fertilizers, or one of those polite and persuasive invitations to vote for a certain man for a town office, which penetrated even to the Hand's little gray kennel of a

house toward election-time, was such a rarity that Mrs. Hand forgot the bread just done in the oven, and sank down wearily on the door-step to read it.

"Well, you ain't a-goin'," she said to Drusilla, who stood quite patiently by, with a faint color in her pale face. "No, sir, you ain't a-goin' one step. She was too stuck-up to come here when she was alive, 'n' you ain't a-goin' to take care of her children dead, 'n' that's the end of it."

Druse made no reply. She never did. Instead, she bent her thin, childish back, and pulled the burning bread out of the oven.

None the less, Druse went.

It was all Pop's work. Pop was meek and soft; he cried gently of a Sunday evening at church, the tears trickling down the furrowed leather-colored skin into the sparse beard, and on week-days he was wont to wear a wide and vacuous smile; yet somehow, if Pop said this or that should be, it was,--at least in the little house on the edge of the village.

And Pop had said Druse should go. For after all, the case is hard, even if one is occupying a lofty position to rural eyes as a carpenter in "York," with a city wife, who has flung her head contemptuously at the idea of visiting his ne'er-do-weel brother; the case is hard, no matter how high one's station may be, to be left with three motherless children, over-fond of the street, with no one to look after them, or make ready a comfortable bit of dinner at night. And so, considering that Elvir was fourteen, and stronger than Druse, any way, and that John Hand had promised to send a certain little sum to his brother every month, as well as to clothe Druse, Druse went to live in the fourth flat in the Vere de Vere.

Perhaps that was not just the name, but it was something equally high-sounding and aristocratic; and it seemed quite fitting that one of the dirty little cards that instructed the postman and the caller, should bear the pleasing name, "Blanche de Courcy." But Druse had never read novels. Her acquaintance with fiction had been made entirely through the medium of the Methodist Sunday School library, and the heroines did not, as a rule, belong to the higher rank in which, as we know, the lords and ladies are all Aubreys, and Montmorencis, and Maudes, and Blanches. Still even Druse's untrained eye lingered with pleasure on the name, as she came in one morning, after having tasted the delights of life in the Vere de Vere for a couple of weeks. She felt that she now lived a very idle life. She had coaxed the three children into a regular attendance at school, and her uncle was always away until night. She could not find enough work to occupy her, though, true to her training, when there was nothing else to do she scrubbed everything wooden and scoured everything tin. Still there were long hours when it

was tiresome to sit listening to the tramping overhead, or the quarrels below, watching the slow hands of the clock; and Druse was afraid in the streets yet, though she did not dare say so, because her bold, pert little cousins laughed at her. She was indeed terribly lonely. Her uncle was a man of few words; he ate his supper, and went to sleep after his pipe and the foaming pitcher of beer that had frightened Druse when she first came. For Druse had been a "Daughter of Temperance" in East Green. She had never seen any one drink beer before. She thought of the poem that the minister's daughter (in pale blue muslin, tucked to the waist) had recited at the Temperance Lodge meeting. It began:

"Pause, haughty man, whose lips are at the brim
Of Hell's own draught, in yonder goblet rare--"

She wished she had courage to repeat it. She felt if Uncle John could have heard Lucinda recite it--. Yet he might not think it meant him; he was not haughty, although he was a carpenter, and the beer he drank out of one of the children's mugs. But it troubled Druse. She thought of it as she sat one afternoon, gravely crotcheting a tidy after an East Green pattern, before it was time for the children to be back from school. It was a warm day in October, so warm that she had opened the window, letting in with the air the effluvia from the filthy street, and the discordant noises. The lady in the flat above was whipping a refractory child, whose cries came distinctly through the poor floors and partitions of the Vere De Vere.

Suddenly there was a loud, clumsy knock at the door. She opened it, and a small boy with a great basket of frilled and ruffled clothes, peeping from under the cover, confronted her.

"Say, lady," he asked, red and cross, "Is yer name De Courcy?"

"No, it ain't," replied Druse. "She's the back flat to the right, here. I'll show you," she added, with the country instinct of "neighboring."

The boy followed her, grumbling, through the long narrow hall, and as Druse turned to go, after his loud pound on the door, it suddenly flew open. Druse stood rooted to the ground. A dirty pink silk wrapper, with a long train covered with dirtier lace, is not a beautiful garment by full daylight. Yet to untrained eyes it looked almost gorgeous, gathered about the handsome form. Miss De Courcy had failed to arrange her hair for the afternoon, and it fell in heavy black folds on her shoulders, and her temples were bandaged by a white handkerchief. Perhaps it was not strange that Druse stood and gazed at her. The dark, brilliant eyes fixed themselves on the slight, flat-chested little form, clad in brown alpaca, on the pale hair drawn straight back from the pale face, and arranged in a tight knob at the back of the head.

A whim seized the fair wearer of the negligée. "Come in and sit down, I want to talk to you. There, leave the clothes, boy. I'll pay your mother

next time," and she pushed the boy out, and drew the young girl in with easy audacity.

Druse looked around the room in bewilderment. It was not exactly dirty, but things seemed to have been thrown in their places. The carpet was bright, and much stained, rather than worn; hideous plaques and plush decorations abounded. A crimson chair had lost a leg, and was pushed ignominiously in a corner of the tiny room; a table was crowded with bottles and fragments of food, and a worn, velvet jacket and much-beplumed hat lay amongst them. A ragged lace skirt hung over the blue sofa, on one corner of which Miss De Courcy threw herself down, revealing a pair of high heeled scarlet slippers. "Sit down," she said, in a rather metallic voice, that ill accorded with the rounded curves of face and figure. "I've got a beastly headache," pushing up the bandage on her low brow. "What did you run for, when I opened the door? Did your folks tell you not to come in here, ever?"

"Why, no, ma'am!" said Druse, raising her blue, flower-like eyes wonderingly.

"Oh! well," responded Miss De Courcy, with a hoarse little laugh of amusement. "I thought they might have--thought maybe they objected to your making 'cquaintances without a regular introduction, you know. Haven't been here long, have you?"

"No," said Druse, looking down at her tidy, with a sudden homesick thrill. "No, I--I come from East Green, Connecticut. I ain't got used to it here, much. It's kind o' lonesome, days. I s'pose you don't mind it. It's different if you're used to it, I guess."

Somehow Druse did not feel as timid as usual, though her weak little voice, thin, like the rest of her, faltered a trifle, but then she had never called on a lady so magnificently dressed before.

"Yes, I'm pretty well used to it by this," replied Miss De Courcy, with the same joyless little laugh, giving the lace skirt an absent-minded kick with her red morocco toe. "I lived in the country before--when I was little."

"You did!" exclaimed Druse. "Then I guess you know how it is at first. When you think every Friday night (there ain't been but two, yet) 'There, they're gettin' ready for Lodge meetin';' and every Sunday evenin' 'bout half-past seven: 'I guess it's mos' time for the Meth'dis' bell to ring. I must get my brown felt on, and--'"

"Your what?" asked Miss De Courcy.

"My brown felt, my hat, an'--oh! well, there's lots o' things I kind o' forget, and start to get ready for. An' I can't sleep much on account of not having Bell an' Virey an' Mimy to bed with me. It's so lonesome

without 'em. The children here won't sleep with me. I did have Gusty one night, but I woke her up four times hangin' on to her. I'm so used to holding Mimy in! Oh! I guess I'll get over it all right, but you know how it is yourself."

Miss De Courcy did not reply. She had closed her eyes, and now she gave the bandage on her head an angry twitch. "_Oh_, how it aches!" she said through her shut teeth. "Here, give me that bottle on the stand, will you? It'll make it worse, but _I_ don't care. My doctor's medicine don't seem to do me much good, but I sort of keep on taking it," she said to Druse, grandly as she poured out a brownish liquid into the cloudy glass that the good little housekeeper had eyed dubiously, before giving it to her.

Miss De Courcy's doctor evidently believed in stimulants; a strong odor of Scotch whiskey filled the room.

"It smells quite powerful, doesn't it?" she said. "It has something in it to keep it, you know. It's very unpleasant to take," she added, rolling up her brown eyes to Druse's compassionate face.

"I do' know as it would do you any good, prob'ly it wouldn't," said Druse shyly, shifting the glass from one hand to the other, "but I used to stroke Ma's head lots, when she had a chance to set down, and it ached bad."

Miss De Courcy promptly stretched herself at full length, and settled her feet comfortably in the lace skirts, in which the high, sharp heels tore two additional rents, and pulled the bandage from her forehead.

"Go ahead," she said, laconically. Druse dragged a chair to the side of the couch, and for some minutes there was silence--that is, the comparative silence that might exist in the Vere De Vere--while she deftly touched the burning smooth flesh with her finger tips.

Miss De Courcy opened her eyes drowsily. "I guess I'm going to get a nap, after all. You're doing it splendid. You'll come and see me again, won't you? Say, don't tell your folks you was here to-day, will you? I'll tell you why. I--I've got a brother that drinks. It's awful. He comes to see me evenings a good deal, and some daytimes. They'd be afraid he'd be home, 'n' they wouldn't let you come again. He's cross, you see 'n' they'd never--let you come again 'f you--"

Miss De Courcy was almost overpowered by sleep. She roused herself a moment and looked at Druse with dull pleading. "Don't you tell 'em, will you? Promise! I want you to come again. A girl isn't to blame if her father--I mean her brother--"

"Yes, ma'am, I'll promise, of course I will," said Druse hastily, her thin little bosom swelling with compassion. "I won't never let 'em know

I know you, if you say so. No, ma'am, it's awful cruel to blame you for your brother's drinkin'. I've got some pieces about it at home, about folkses' families a-sufferin' for their drinkin'. I'd like to come again if you want me. I'm afraid I ain't much company, but I could stroke your head every time you have a headache. It's awful nice to know somebody that's lived in the country and understands just how it is when you first--"

Druse looked down. The doctor's remedy was apparently successful this time, for with crimson cheeks and parted lips, Miss Blanche De Courcy had forgotten her headache in a very profound slumber. Druse gazed at her with mingled admiration and pity. No wonder the room seemed a little untidy. She would have liked to put it to rights, but fearing she might waken her new friend, who was now breathing very heavily, she only pulled the shade down, and with a last compassionate glance at the victim of a brother's intemperance, she picked up her crocheting and tip-toed lightly from the room.

After that life in the Vere De Vere was not so dreary. Druse was not secretive, but she had the accomplishment of silence, and she kept her promise to the letter. Druse could not feel that she could be much consolation to so elegant a being. Miss De Courcy was often *_distracte_* when she brought her crocheting in of an afternoon, or else she was extremely, not to say boisterously gay, and talked or laughed incessantly, or sang at the upright piano that looked too large for the little parlor. The songs were apt to be compositions with such titles as, "Pretty Maggie Kelly," and "Don't Kick him when He's Down," but Druse never heard anything more reprehensible, and she thought them beautiful.

Sometimes, quite often indeed, her hostess had the headaches that forced her to resort to the doctor's disagreeable remedy from the black bottle, or was sleeping off a headache on the sofa. Miss De Courcy did not seem to have many women friends. Once, it is true, two ladies with brilliant golden hair, and cheeks flushed perhaps by the toilsome ascent to the fourth floor, rustled loudly into the parlor. They were very gay, and so finely dressed, one in a bright green plush coat, and the other in a combination of reds, that Druse made a frightened plunge for the door and escaped, but not before one of the ladies had inquired, with a peal of laughter, "Who's the kid?" Druse had flushed resentfully, but she did not care when her friend told her afterward, with a toss of the head, "*_They're_* nothing. They just come here to see how I was fixed."

After a little Druse offered timidly to clean up the room for her, and quite regularly then, would appear on each Wednesday with her broom and duster, happy to be allowed to bring order out of chaos.

"Well, you are a good little thing," Miss De Courcy would say, pulling on her yellow gloves and starting for the street when the dust began to fly. She never seemed to be doing anything. A few torn books lay about,

but Druse never saw her open them. She had warned Druse not to come in of an evening, for her brother might be home in a temper. Druse thought she saw him once, such a handsome man with his hair lightly tinged with gray; he was turning down the hall as Druse came wearily up the stairs, and she saw him go in Miss De Courcy's room; but then again when Gusty was sick, and she had to go down at night and beg the janitress to come up and see if it were the measles, there was a much younger man, with reddened eyes, from whose glance Druse shrank as she passed him, and he certainly reeled a little, and he also went in Miss De Courcy's door, and from motives of delicacy she did not ask which was he,--though she felt a deep curiosity to know. Not that Miss De Courcy refrained from mentioning him. On the contrary, she told heart-rending incidents of his cruelty, as she tilted back and forth lazily in her rocking-chair, while Druse sat by, spellbound, her thin hands clasped tightly over the work in her lap, neglecting even the bon-bons that Miss De Courcy lavished upon her.

One morning there was a cruel purple mark on the smooth dark skin of Miss De Courcy's brow, and the round wrist was red and swollen. Druse's eyes flashed as she saw them. "I expect I'm as wicked as a murderer," she said, "for I wish that brother of yours was dead. Yes, I do, 'n' I'd like to kill him!" And the self-contained and usually stoical little thing burst into passionate tears, and hid her face in Miss De Courcy's lap.

A dark flush passed over that young lady's face, and something glittered in the hard blue eyes. She drew Druse tight against her heart, as though she would never let her go, and then she laughed nervously, trying to soothe her. "There, there, it ain't anything. They're all brutes, but I was ugly myself last night, 'n' made him mad. Tell me something about the country, Druse, like you did the other day--anything. I don't care."

"Do you wish you was back there, too?" asked homesick Druse, wistfully. Druse could no more take root in the city than could a partridge-berry plant, set in the flinty earth of the back-yard.

"Wish I was back? Yes, if I could go back where I used to live," said Miss De Courcy with her hoarse, abrupt little laugh. "No, I don't either. Folks are pretty much all devils, city or country."

Druse shivered a little. She looked up with dumb pleading into the reckless, beautiful face she had learned to love so well from her humble tendings and ministerings. She had the nature to love where she served. She had no words to say, but Miss De Courcy turned away from the sorrowful, puzzled eyes of forget-me-not blue, the sole beauty of the homely, irregular little face.

"I was only a-joking, Druse," she added, smiling. "Come, let's make some lemonade."

But Druse did not forget these and other words. She pondered over them as she lay in her stifling little dark bedroom at night, or attended to her work by day, and she waged many an imaginary battle for the beautiful, idle woman who represented the grace of life to her.

The fat janitress sometimes stopped to gossip a moment with Druse.

"Ever seen Miss De Courcy on your floor?" she asked, one day, curiously.

"Yes, ma'am, I--I've seen her," replied Druse, truthfully, the color rising to her pale cheeks.

"O Lord!" ejaculated the janitress, heaving a portentous sigh from the depths of her capacious, brown calico-covered bosom, "if I was the owner of these here flats, instead of the old miser that's got 'em, wouldn't I have a clearin' out! Wouldn't I root the vice and wickedness out of some of 'em! Old Lowder don't care what he gits in here, so long's they pay their rent!"

Druse did not reply. She felt sure that the janitress meant Miss De Courcy's drunken brother, and she was very glad that "old Lowder" was not so particular, for she shuddered to think how lonely she should be were it not for the back flat to the right. Even the janitress, who seemed so kind, was heartless to Miss De Courcy because she had a drunken brother!

Druse began to find the world very, very cruel. The days went on, and the two lives, so radically unlike, grew closer entwined. Druse lost none of her stern, angular little ways. She did not learn to lounge, or to desire fine clothing. If either changed, an observer, had there been one, might have noticed that Miss De Courcy did not need as much medicine as formerly, that the hard ring of her laugh was softened when Druse went by, and that never an oath--and we have heard that ladies of the highest rank have been known to swear under strong provocation--escaped the full red lips in Druse's presence.

One morning Druse went about the household duties with aching limbs and a dizzy head. For the first since she had acted as her uncle's housekeeper, she looked hopelessly at the kitchen floor, and left it unscrubbed: it was sweeping day, too, but the little rooms were left unswept, and she lay all the morning in her dark bedroom, in increasing dizziness and pain. For some days she had been languid and indisposed, and now real illness overcame her; her head was burning, and vague fears of sickness assaulted her, and a dread of the loneliness of the black little room. She dragged herself down the hall. Miss De Courcy opened the door. Her own eyes were red and swollen as with unshed tears. She pulled Druse in impetuously.

"I'm so glad you're come. I--Why, child, what is the matter with you? What ails you, Druse?"

She took Druse's hot little hand in her's and led her to the mirror. Druse looked at herself with dull, sick eyes; her usually pallid face was crimson, and beneath the skin, purplish angry discolorations appeared in the flesh.

"I guess I'm goin' to be sick," she said, with a despairing cadence. "I expect it's somethin' catchin'. I'll go home. Let me go home."

She started for the door, but her limbs suddenly gave way, and she fell, a limp little heap on the floor.

Miss De Courcy looked at her a moment in silence. Her eyes wandered about the room, and fell on a crumpled letter on the table. She paused a moment, then she turned decisively, and let down the folding-bed that stood in the corner by day. She lifted the half-conscious Druse in her strong young arms, and laid her on the bed. It was only a few minutes' work to remove the coarse garments, and wrap her in a perfumed, frilled nightdress, that hung loosely on the spare little form. Miss De Courcy surveyed the feverish face against the pillows anxiously. Druse half opened her dull eyes and moaned feebly; she lifted her thin arms and clasped them around Miss De Courcy's neck. "Ain't you good!" she said thickly, drawing the cool cheek down against her hot brow.

"I'm going for the doctor, Druse," said Miss De Courcy, coaxingly. "Now, you lay right still, and I'll be back in no time. Don't you move; promise, Druse!"

And Druse gave an incoherent murmur that passed for a promise.

The doctor, who lived on the corner, a shabby, coarse little man, roused her from a fevered dream. He asked a few questions perfunctorily, turned the small face to the light a moment, and cynically shrugged his shoulders.

"Small-pox," was his laconic remark, when he had followed Miss De Courcy into the next room.

"Then she's going to stay right here," said that young woman firmly.

"Well, I guess _not_" replied the doctor, looking her over. "How about your own complexion if you take it?" he added, planting a question he expected to tell.

Miss De Courcy's remark was couched in such forcible terms that I think I had better not repeat it. It ought to have convinced any doctor living that her complexion was her own affair.

"Oh! that's all right," replied the man of science, unoffended, a tardy recognition of her valor showing through his easy insolence. "But how

about the Board of Health, and how about me? She's better off in a hospital, any way. You can't take care of her," with a scornful glance at the draggled finery and striking hat. "What do you want to try it for? I can't let the contagion spread all over the house, you know; how would you get anything to eat? No, it's no use. She's got to go. I'm not going to ruin my reputation as a doctor, and--"

Miss De Courcy smiled sweetly into the doctor's hard, common face. She drew a purse from her pocket, and selected several bills from a roll that made his small eyes light up greedily, and pressing the little packet into his not too reluctant fingers, she remarked significantly, as she sat down easily on the top of a low table:

"You're mistaken about what's the matter with her, doctor. She's got the chicken-pox. You just look at her again as you go out, and you'll see that I am right. But it's just as well to be careful. You might mail a note for me when you go out, and my wash-woman will buy things for me, and bring them up here to the door. I'll swear I won't go out till you say I may, or till you take me to the hospital. And then, as you go along, you can step into the front flat left, and tell her uncle she's took bad with chicken-pox. He's got a lot of young ones, and he'll be glad enough to let me do it, see? And of course, chicken-pox is quite serious sometimes. I should expect to pay a doctor pretty well to bring a patient out of it," she added, with a placid smile.

The doctor had turned, and was looking with deep interest at a chromo on the wall.

"I'll take another look at her. I may have been mistaken, doctors sometimes are--symptoms alike--and--m--m--you can get that letter ready for me to mail."

Strange days and nights ensued. Druse had a dim knowledge of knocks at the door at night, of curses and oaths muttered in the hall, of Miss De Courcy's pleading whispers, of a final torrent of imprecations, and then of a comparative lull; of days and nights so much alike in their fevered dull monotony that one could not guess where one ended and another began; of an occasional glimpse that melted into the general delirium, of Miss De Courcy's face, white, with heavy, dark-ringed eyes, bending over her, and of Miss De Courcy's voice, softened and changed, with never a harsh note; of her hand always ready with cooling drink for the blackened, dreadful mouth. Yes, in the first few days Druse was conscious of this much, and of a vague knowledge that the rocking ship on which she was sailing in scorching heat, that burnt the flesh from the body, was Miss De Courcy's bed; and then complete darkness closed in upon the dizzy little traveller, sailing on and on in the black, burning night, further and further away from the world and from life.

How could she guess how many days and nights she sailed thus? The ship stopped, that was all she knew; but still it was dark, so dark; and then

she was in a strange land where the air was fire, and everything one touched was raging with heat, and her hands, why had they bandaged her hands, so that she could not move them?

"I can't see," said Druse, in a faint, puzzled whisper. "Is it night?"

And Miss De Courcy, bending over the bed, haggard and wan, and years older in the ghostly gray dawn, said soothingly:

"Yes, Druse, it's night," for she knew Druse would never see the light again.

"Miss De Courcy!"

"Yes, Druse."

"I expect I've kept your brother out all this time. I hope he won't be mad."

"No, no, Druse; be quiet and sleep."

"I can't sleep. I wish it would be morning. I want to see you, Miss De Courcy. Well, never mind. Somehow, I guess I ain't goin' to get better. If what I've had--ain't catchin'--I suppose you wouldn't want to--to kiss me, would you?"

Without hesitation, the outcast bent her face, purified and celestial with love and sacrifice; bent it over the dreadful Thing, loathsome and decaying, beyond the semblance of human form or feature, on the bed,--bent and kissed, as a mother would have kissed.

The gray dawn crept yet further into the room, the streets were growing noisier, the Elevated trains rushed by the corner, the milkmen's carts rumbled along the Avenue, the sparrows twittered loudly on the neighboring roofs. And yet it seemed so solemnly silent in the room. "Well, now!" said Druse, with pleased surprise, "I didn't expect you would. What a long time it is gettin' light this mornin'. To think of you, a-takin' care of _me_, like this! An' I ain't never done a thing for you excep' the headaches and sweepin', an' even that was nicer for me than for you. I knew you was awful good, but I never knew you was religious before, Miss De Courcy. Nobody but folks that has religion does such things, they say. I wish I could remember my prayers. Ain't it strange, I've forgot them all? Couldn't you say one? Just a little one?"

And Miss De Courcy, her face buried in her hands, said, "Lord, have mercy upon us," and said no more.

"Thank you," said Druse, more feebly, and quite satisfied. "We won't forget each other, an' you'll promise to come by'm'by. Won't you? I'll be so pleased when you come!"

"Yes, Druse," whispered Miss De Courcy, "I promise."

And then the terrible form that had been Druse sat up in bed with a mighty effort, and turned its sightless eyes joyfully toward Miss De Courcy's tear-stained face.

"It's morning! I can see you!" it said, and fell back into the faithful arms and upon the faithful breast.

And so Druse, not having lived and died in vain, passed away forever from the Vere De Vere.



VILLEGIATURA

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of **Balloons**, by Elizabeth Bibesco

[_To MARCEL PROUST_]

What a fool he had been to come. These wooden walls creaking at a touch, and the floors responding like an animal in pain to the lightest footstep. Not that Marie Aimée had light footsteps--far from it. She clattered about with the happy noisiness of a good conscience and perfect health. In her hands the opening of a door became an air-raid and yet what could you do, confronted with her rosy face beaming with a child-like confidence in giving pleasure and satisfaction.

No, it was entirely his own fault. Everything was what he might have expected. The sea was just where he had been told it would be, the air was relentlessly bracing, the cleanliness of the Hotel Bungalow reminded you of a shiny soaped face which had never known powder. It was all, he reflected, quite horrible. The salt-laden wind blowing the sand up from the dunes, the hard bright sunshine, the effect everything gave you of having been painted with the six colours of a child's rather cheap paint-box.

"A different man," she had said he would feel. Well he felt it already--the lassitude of his body feebly revolting against the impending bracing, his eyes watering at the glare. Health and

inspiration, Marthe had said, dreamless sleep, an insatiable appetite and perfect peace in which to finish his novel. "Think how quiet it will be," she had said. As if the country were ever quiet, crowded as it was with locos and dogs and sabots. Surely peace meant Paris in August, with every one away, thick carpets and a noiseless valet.

Maurice imagined himself merging into a huge armchair, just able to see a square glass vase of Juliette roses--gilt petals lined with deep pink velvet. Why on earth were there never any flowers in the country? And no one would disturb him--no one. Privacy is only possible in a big town. Every detail of life in the Hotel Bungalow was revealed to him in a series of sights, sounds and smells. And should a fellow lunatic arrive, how was he to avoid him? At every meal there would be little exchanges of the banal, after dinner a game of billiards--even possibly, horror of horrors, potential excursions planned with zest and good fellowship. And all the time he would be saying "No," more and more ungraciously, or, worse still--and far more likely--saying "yes."

And then where would his novel be? Not that it was possible any way to write in a place where the sun was always in your eyes, the wind blew your paper away and creaking boards made sitting in your bedroom out of the question.

Marthe was a fool, given up entirely to hygiene and plans for other people. "You will come back bubbling over with physical fitness, your dear face all tanned," she had said. "Dear" indeed! It was simply a bribe. He was being bribed for his own good. And to think that like a great gaby he had been shoved off to the sea by one term of endearment, and to a place, too, where there was neither shade nor shadows, simply miles and miles of bright monotonous sea, three dusty cornflowers, two bedraggled poppies and the sun all around you.

Tanned, indeed! Why his face would be all blisters and his eyes bloodshot.

The insensitiveness of women!

If Marthe were here she would bathe before breakfast, feed the hens, find the eggs, encourage the cook, pat the dog, listen to the story of Marie Aimée's life, pick the cornflowers, praise the cook, churn the butter, play with the children, climb on to the hay cart, collect shells on the beach, lie in the sun, let the sand trickle through her fingers and explain with perfect sincerity that it was the most delightful place in the world.

But he didn't like paddling or shrimping or sailing or farmyard life. He wanted a velvet lawn, a cedar, a rose garden, lavender, a sun dial, iced lemonade and solitude. Or he wanted his own cool apartment, with drawn sunblinds, vases full of flowers, his immense writing table, and a deserted Paris around him.

Women always did to you as they wanted to be done by. That sort of literal interpretation of Christianity showed such a lack of imagination. It was no good telling Marthe that you didn't like the sea, she simply wouldn't believe it.

"Think of the sunset reflected in the wet sand," she would say, and if you told her that you didn't want to think about it, that it was no fit subject for an active mind, she would be hurt.

In any case no one had a right to make you do things for your own good. It was a horrible form of self-sacrifice. If Marthe had said, "_Please_ go to St. Jean-les-Flots and pick me a poppy," he would have been delighted, but to stay at the Hotel Bungalow in the interests of his own health was a very different matter.

Marie Aimée was putting a pot with one red geranium in it on his writing table. It was, she explained, still very early in the season but Monsieur must not be discouraged. Later it became very gay with dancing and Japanese lanterns in the garden. The Hotel Bungalow would be quite full, whereas now there was only Monsieur and a lady.

"A lady?"

"But yes, Monsieur."

"A young lady?"

"A lady of a certain age."

Maurice hoped that it would be an uncertain age. Of course every one over twenty would seem old to Marie Aimée. Probably the lady was on that exquisite frontier line, the early thirties, when the bud is already unfurling its petals, angles have softened into curves, and the significant is stirring in everything like a quickening child. Thirty, the age of delicate response, of subtle tasting, divorced equally from the ignorant impetuosity of youth and the desperate clutchings of middle age. How he disliked young girls with their sunburn, their manly strides, their meaningless giggles, their eternal nicknames! And, over their heads, a warning and a trade mark, that sword of Damocles--marriage.

Maurice was feeling a little happier. As he walked into lunch he felt a real twinge of curiosity. Ridiculous it was--why he was getting quite romantic, imagining an exquisite creature on a holiday from her husband. That was no doubt the result of the Hotel Bungalow. On the velvet lawn with the cedar, the rose garden, the sun dial and the iced lemonade, he would have been enjoying to the full his usual ironic detachment, but St. Jean-les-Flots would throw any one to romance.

He walked into the dining room. At the far end with her back to him sat the lady. She wore a white coat embroidered with black, a white skirt, a white hat with a white lace veil. On the chair beside her lay a Holland sunshade lined with green. It was he thought, deplorable, and indicated yellow spectacles. Her feet were very small and gave you the impression of an insecure foundation to her body. Her back was broad. She was certainly over forty. Forty, thought Maurice, the dangerous age--the desperate age. From forty to fifty, the flower in full bloom, the period of engulfing passions, of urgent transitory satisfactions. For how many women must it not be a ten years' death struggle.

"What a place," Maurice was disgusted; "it is driving me to melodrama."

The lady got up with a certain waddling stateliness (perhaps after all she was fifty). Her clothes fell into perfection--she walked slowly and calmly with appraising steps. The lace veil was over her face. She did not forget her sunshade, her bag, or her handkerchief. Louis, the waiter, opened the door for her. She sailed out like a gondola on the stage, or Lohengrin's swan. Her movements gave an effect of invisible wheels.

During the afternoon she remained undetectable, which was a tour de force at St. Jean-les-Flots, where the landscape was a successful conspiracy against concealment, and a sunshade could be seen for miles. Maurice had a tiresome feeling that she was lying out somewhere with that horrible sunshade over her head and a novel by Gyp on her lap. Had she, he wondered, ever read any of his books? Perhaps when she found out his name she would come up to him and say: "Are you _the_ Mr. Maurice Van Trean?" And when he had bowed in the affirmative, she would add that she liked "Sur les Rives" best of his books--"she had read them all many times--and especially that marvellous description of Camille's return to her husband."

Maurice walked for miles down the hard glaring white road. It was the most uncomfortable thing he could think of doing, and when you are determined to enjoy nothing there is a certain voluptuous satisfaction in a maximum of unpleasantness. The air was burning and solid. An occasional convolvulus drowned in dust straggled in weary clinging grace by the roadside--a pathetic symbol, he reflected, of the pale refined irrelevant women who fade ineffectually beside the highways of life. He thought of Marthe with her urgent pulsating rhythm, the rhythm he remembered bitterly, that had brought him here. He wished vindictively that she were beside him, the hard burning surface of the road biting through the soles of her shoes. He would walk on and on till there were blisters on her feet and her steps were lagging. His teeth were set in the grim satisfaction of revenge.

"This is the country," he would say. "Do you feel the health-giving sea breeze you told me about?"

He stopped suddenly. Walking towards him was the lady. The offensive sunshade was over her head, but her veil was up. She was, he supposed, forty-six--no, forty-four. Her eyes were wide apart, dark and indolent and long--brown or blue they might have been. Her face was wide and so was her mouth with lips like curtains drawn across the teeth. Her cheek-bones were high and her skin, like marshmallow, was marbled with the bright yellow lights and bright blue shadows of early afternoon. There was a curious grace about her broad solid figure, an unhurried indifferent grace, as if she said to herself, "I shall please at my own time." She was not pretty. Her clothes belonged to her as essentially as her limbs.

Maurice took off his hat.

"Forgive me, Madame, but I think that we are both living at the Hotel Bungalow."

"I think so, too," she said drily.

He thought that she thought that he was taking a liberty, which made him suppose that she was not quite a lady, which made him accuse himself of vulgarity.

And then she laughed, and his accusations, both of her and of himself, fled.

They walked back together and he explained to her just how much he hated the sea, the heat, the Hotel Bungalow, the cook, and Marie Aimée's footsteps. He explained how anxious he had been about her--how he had longed to see her face--how much her sunshade had depressed him--how her lace veil had been a personal enemy.

She said that she adored the country....

He told her that only in big towns could you find peace or flowers.

She said the Hotel Bungalow had "un caractère assez spécial...."

He did not listen to her comments--they were mere breathing places. On the subject of the sea he was, he thought, almost witty, with a touch of real indignation.

She said the sea was her passion....

He decided that she was an obstinate woman--entêtée. How ridiculous to love the sea--especially for some one who pretended to like the country. The two were practically incompatible. Could she explain her point of view?

The sea, she said, was such a wonderful escape....

He was thrilled. A thousand explanations of her presence at the Hotel Bungalow jostled one another in his mind.

Of course he quite understood what she meant about the sea. It had a certain spaciousness and it did, so to speak, quarantine you from life. For instance, in a rowing boat, it was impossible to feel the importance of being a snob.

That was not, she said, exactly what she meant....

Maurice was annoyed. He was accustomed to people who were proud to share his meanings.

Madame would perhaps be able to explain....

It was not, Madame murmured, a question of being able to explain, but of being able to interrupt....

Maurice flushed and relapsed into sulky silence. He watched his companion trotting by his side, taking three little steps to each one of his. He took a childish pleasure in making his strides as wide as possible, upsetting the rhythm of her walk. The brim of her hat hid her eyes. He felt that his uncertainty as to their expression gave the matter an interest that it did not intrinsically possess. Even if she were smiling, what did it matter?

Suddenly she turned to him.

"Has Monsieur anything more to conceal from me?" she asked.

Maurice capitulated. It was a delightful formula. He wished that he had thought of it himself. It was she, he said, who had been hiding things from him. Her eyes, for instance. All this time he had been wondering about the expression of her eyes.

"And yet you deny the potency of the country," she sighed, "the miracle-working country, which compels a young man of twenty-seven to wonder about the expression of an old woman of forty-four."

"Madame," he said, "I am very old. I have ceased to take myself seriously. You are very young, for you can force others to treat you with curiosity and respect."

She reminded him that eight minutes ago he had taken himself seriously. "It was you who made me," he retorted, "you have given me back my youth."

They went on like that for quite a long time--gallant lawn-tennis--long base line rallies with an occasional smash. And then he said that he

must be indiscreet--specifically so. Why had she come to St. Jean-les-Flots?

It was, she explained meditatively, an escape (he noticed that it was the second time that she had used that word). The Hotel Bungalow was very clean, the food was good, the air was marvellous....

She pulled herself together.

When you took a holiday, she said, you had to make a careful choice between old acquaintances and new ones. Which was likely to be the more tiring? She herself always went to new places at the wrong time of year. Then it was a case of friendship, or nothing. The people who visited watering places out of season were always either impossible or enchanting. Very often amusingly impossible and temporarily enchanting, but so much the better. There is a certain safety in the transitory.

Is Madame married? Maurice asked abruptly. It was the sort of question that had to be asked brusquely, or not at all.

"Yes--No--Yes. That is to say, I have a husband. He will probably come here for a day or two later. He is très comme il faut."

"Surely you do not blame him for coming to see you."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It is magnificent, but it is not life. One is not always young enough to permit oneself these phantasies. At fifty-six it is silly to waste two days visiting some one you don't want to see. But there, Edmond is like that. Oh! the stability when he says 'my wife.' It is superb. It must be grand, too, when he says 'ma maitresse'; he has the property sense. And how he adores women, woman, all women, any woman. Even sometimes me. And when he doesn't, he keeps the habits. Toujours des petits soins. He never goes out of training, even at home."

"He sounds charming to live with."

"Ah, yes. That is it. He is charming. One cannot bear it. To have the five-finger exercises of his irresistibility played on one. To be the stiff piano on which he practises but never plays. It is too much. And one remembers the days when one was the concert grand. Pouf. It is not agreeable."

There was a pause. Maurice knew that she was going to say a great many other things.

But they had reached the Hotel Bungalow. Regretfully they parted.

He thought that she was a very remarkable woman indeed.

She thought how like her husband he was. Her husband twenty-five years ago.

At dinner she still was in black and white. Black covered with filmy laces, soft and shadowy and mysterious. After dinner they sat on the terrace and looked out at the inky relentless sea.

"Being sensible is no good at all," she said with sudden passion. "Courage is the only helpful virtue; when I married I was young and very pretty and I had thought about life a lot. I knew that in men fidelity had the importance that they gave to it. To a few--very few--it matters--but in most cases unfaithfulness is not a psychological thing at all; it is simply a temporary excess like getting drunk--squalid, if you like--but not touching your real relationships. Women bluff a lot on the subject and many are fools. They believe in the same law for both sexes. It is a ridiculous fallacy. Only Edmond was different. He loved women--_psychologically_. He was therefore inconstant, which is the real sin against marriage. He was a great lover, an artist. Every woman was to him what a canvas is to a painter, a violin to a violinist. The colours and the sounds he got were marvellous. Sometimes he would try impossible subjects--for fun--but always he could bring some sort of harmony out of everything. Ma foi, it amuses me to watch him now--now that it is difficult, and he is fifty-six and I don't love him--but then, when everything was easy and he was twenty-seven and I cared--then it was--well, it was different."

The way that her voice opened and shut reminded him of a sea anemone.

"It is not the way to talk to a stranger, is it?" she said abruptly, "but I feel as if I had known you for a long time. For twenty-five years, to be exact," she added.

Maurice felt curiously tongue-tied. He longed to tell her about Marthe. For the first time in his life he was finding a confidence difficult to make. He wondered why.

"Bon soir, Monsieur," she said, and she walked up to bed with a characteristic lack of pause or hesitation.

Maurice woke up--was woken up--knowing that he had something to look forward to. Sleepily he wondered what it was while patterns spread over his semi-consciousness--dreamily he saw Marthe in a filmy lace dress over black and he felt himself trying to play on a grand piano, every note of which was a sea anemone. Then he woke up completely, and with a delightful rush he remembered Madame and all of the marvellous things that she had told him and all of the significant things he had not yet said to her.

He walked down to breakfast whistling. In the courtyard he patted the

dog and lifted the patron's son on to his shoulder, then he asked the patronne if the cook had a name and whether he might some day come and watch her churn butter. In the dining room he praised the coffee, and admired the geraniums. St. Jean-les-Flots must have a particularly fine soil for geraniums, and what air! Why, he felt a different man already.

Madame Marly--he had discovered her name--did not appear till lunch. They bowed to one another, and each talked a little to the waiter. It was delightful to keep their pleasure at arm's length. Coffee on the terrace brought them together.

"You are right," she said, "the country is an impossible place. It makes one talk."

"I love the country," he said.

"And then the sea. It is always going on without you."

"I have a passion for the sea," he murmured.

"I would like to wring the neck of the cook, chloroform the dog, buy Marie Aimée some lawn tennis shoes, and have a daily box of flowers from Paris."

"They shall be ordered at once."

"I should also like," she was looking out to sea, "to fill the hotel with people."

"You flatter me," he murmured.

"Perhaps," she added, "it would be simpler to go away."

"Simpler but impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"The air is unique. The Hotel Bungalow...."

"Please don't," she begged.

"Besides, for the first time in my life I am becoming discreet."

"Ah, no, my friend, believe me. It was merely that you, too, found it difficult to interrupt."

"I did not want to interrupt."

"There you had an advantage over me. I was longing to bring your remarks about the sea to an untimely end."

Her laugh was the most confidential thing in the world. You felt as if she had given you an unlimited credit of intimacy. He thought that she was looking ten years younger in her creamy crêpe de Chine dress, with her big straw hat, which seemed to have conquered, without an effort, the perfection and simplicity of the absolute.

"What is it called?" he asked fingering it.

"Crêpe surprise."

He asked her to describe its lines, but she refused.

"Ne parlons pas robes," she said.

They decided to go for a drive.

The cocher explained that he had lost his wife, but that "Lisette était un très bon petit cheval."

They laughed--at him, at one another, at the sun, at the sea, at everything. He told her about the convolvuluses, and she said he ought to write a book.

He told her his name.

She puckered her forehead a little, and looked to him for help.

He explained rather stiffly that he had written three novels, a book of short sketches, a book of light verse, and a phantasy on Algeria.

She asked what they were called. He told her.

She asked which was the best.

He said that "Sur les Rives" had the best things in it. Perhaps it was less finished than some of the others, but it was on a bigger scale, the conception was more interesting.

She asked what the conception was.

He told her that it was about a woman who, out of affection for her husband, and deep intrinsic virtue, refuses to become the mistress of the man she passionately adores. He goes away and she gives herself to the first person she meets with a look of him. Her original great struggle has exhausted all her powers of resistance.

Madame Marly was silent.

"It is true," she said, "for big things we have big resistances, and for

little things little resistances. And so we live our lives in small weak lapses--not driven by hate or love, but by pique or boredom, lowering our flag to salute a pleasure boat, not a battleship. Pouf," she made a little gesture of disgust that he was beginning to know. "We occupy the places that other people make for us. We curl on their divans, we sprawl in their gutters, we sit proudly on the pedestals they put for us, we occupy their altars, and when we are alone, what happens to us? We dissolve into air."

"Not you," he said. "I feel it. You are so independent, so sure. Where are your hesitations? Your very doubts are challenges to truth."

"Challenges to truth," she said. "It is a nice phrase."

Driving back into the sunset they were silent. He wrapped her cloak round her, and once he kissed her hand, but it didn't feel as if it belonged to her. Her thoughts had taken her right away out of his presence, out of the carriage beyond the sunset. Where had they taken her? He wondered.

* * * * *

That night she came down, dressed in glowing apricot--"fold after fold to the fainting air."

As always, her clothes seemed part of her, without ends or beginnings, flowing from her, a streaming enhancing accompaniment. He asked her if her dress were *nymphé émue* or *feuille morte*. He was proud of knowing those two names. She said it was neither. He begged her to tell him, but she refused rather abruptly to discuss it. He said he loved her clothes--that he would like to know....

"Pour l'amour de Dieu, ne parlons pas robes."

He wondered at her irritability, but he obeyed.

They went out on to the terrace. The sea was black and angry, all the waves at cross purposes.

"What is your name?"

"Paula."

"What will you say when I tell you that I love you, that I want you?"

"You won't tell me because you will know that I don't want you to."

Her voice was a part of the wind.

"Why don't you want me to?" he was urgent--harsh with desire.

"Because it all happened twenty-five years ago."

He didn't understand.

"Because--because there are some things you can't do twice--like your book, they are the big things that create a strength of resistance. Because they are the beautiful things that belong to our dreams. Because they are of a magic fabric, into which you can weave no facts."

It was dark and he could not see her. The end of his cigarette was a bright spot in the night. The sea and the wind were the counterpoint of her voice.

He felt unreal and remote and small. A tiny strand in the vast design of destiny.

She got up and walked in. He did not move.

* * * * *

"Thank you for the flowers."

The sun was glittering frivolous and cynical.

The box he had ordered from Paris had arrived. First there was a mass of Juliette roses--gilt and velvet--then a staircase of sweet peas, flame-coloured, coral, crimson, magenta, purple, bronze and black.

Both together they drank in the blaze of colour.

Ecstatically he said to her,

"You can't thank me, can you? They are too beautiful."

"Perhaps not," she said, "but it was beauty unleashed by you."

He looked at her with adoring eyes. She gave you phrases which lit torches in your soul.

They walked down the beach together. The sea was light and mutinous.

"How untransparent it is," he said, "lapis lazuli and turquoise and chrysoprase--no emeralds or aquamarines, or sapphires."

"How are we to get in our purple without an amethyst?"

"I don't know."

"That is what comes from not reading the Book of Revelations," she said.

They saw big, dissolving, poisonous jellyfish in the sea, mysteriously without lines--and tidy slabs of jellyfish on the beach. They found a starfish, and wondered who came to dance a sword dance round it. They picked up shells that looked as if they had fallen out of fading sunsets or glimmering dawns--they looked into pools of shutting and opening sea anemones.

They never noticed a sardine box or an old boot.

They were happy.

Over her head was a scarlet paper sunshade. It looked like a huge tropical flower.

"Paula," he said--and his eyes opened to her like a magic trap door.

That night they stayed indoors.

"Tell me the things that life has given you," he said, "the things that have made you so rich."

"If I am rich," she said, "it is from the things that I have given."

"Yes," he said, "but why do you impoverish yourself at my expense?"

"Please," she said, "don't talk about that. There are in all of us exposed places--you can call them pain or romance--Sehnsucht or memory--but they are the sanctuaries of our hearts--they cannot be violated."

"Paula," he said, "you have made too much of life. You have made it into the sort of hope that is always a disillusionment."

"Yes," she murmured very low.

"Why were you so impractical?" his bantering tone revived her.

"I have done for some one (even for you, perhaps) what I have never done for myself," she was smiling. "I will tell you a story. There was once a man who loved me. He was born with everything--a marvellous name, great riches, beauty, a magnetic quality that I have never seen equalled. I always reproached him with having added nothing to his inheritance--no glory--no achievement--'I have spent,' he would say, shrugging his shoulders. 'Wasted,' I retorted tartly. 'If you like. I have never admitted my past or my future as barriers--or even frontiers--to my actions. I have lived without forethought or *arrière pensée*--without the weakness of regrets or the stinginess of precautions,' and then he turned to me--his eyes were half shut and his voice was muffled as if a flood were battering on the door of his dispassionateness, 'I have had

everything in life except you,' he said. I smiled at him, a little sadly, a little cynically. 'It is I who have given you the greatest gift,' I said. 'I have given you a regret and an illusion. Vous avez donc tout eu.' That night he killed himself."

"And you, Paula, did you feel a murderess?"

"No, a saviour."

* * * * *

She was dressed in pale lilac--the coolest lilac in the world. It rippled round her like loving caressing waves.

"What is your dress called, Paula?"

"Oasis," she said. "'Indian summer' would have been a better name."

"Tell me about it."

"Why do you always want to know?"

"I am writing a book."

"Tant pis."

She was out of temper.

The flowers arrived.

Old-fashioned pink roses, coral carnations, purple stocks, pink pinks, mauve orchids, moss roses, patterned chintz-like phlox.

"Oh!" she said, and for a moment she shut her eyes.

Then:

"Tell me about her," she said.

"Marthe?"

"Is that her name?"

"She is vibrant."

"But of course. What does she look like?"

"Her hair is like a dirty new coin. You feel that you could polish it into brightness. Her eyes are like tea--yellow camomile tea. Her mouth is big and rather grave. There are electric waves of aliveness running

all through her."

"I do not like her."

"No?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"All that irrelevant, interfering vitality. It is dangerous."

"And slumbering, mysterious magnetism, is that not dangerous?"

"That, too."

There was a thunderstorm and the air got cool.

Madame Marly had a headache and dined in her room.

* * * * *

The next day was grey--grey air, a grey sky, a grey countryside, a grey sea--not luminous, lustrous grey, but opaque chiffon drawn across the world.

Paula's flowers had arrived--lemon-coloured hollyhocks, blue and mauve and purple delphiniums, filmy love-in-the-mist, primrose antirrhinums, snowy Madonna lilies with golden middles, huge creamy roses, tiny yellow rosebuds, straggling larkspurs.

She was dressed in a grey whipcord coat and skirt with a grey swathed turban. She looked distant--on the brink of disappearance--not so much as if she were going to travel but as if she were going to vanish.

She regarded the flowers with grave concentration. It was as if she felt for them a stern passionate devotion. She took one of the white roses and stroked it--as if it were a shy mother with her first child. Then she said:

"I want to go for a long walk."

They walked for miles and miles. The mist sprinkled her hair with dew-drops. It looked quite white. Her eyes were deep and brooding and you couldn't catch them.

"Paula," Maurice said, "how remote you are."

"Am I?" she said. And it made her more remote than ever.

He walked desperately, as if each step were an obstacle painfully overcome. She walked with a swaying unconscious rhythm, as if she did not know what she was doing.

She cut off his perfunctory attempts at conversation with a monosyllable. When they got home they were both tired.

They each decided to have a hot bath and rest before dinner.

She was dressed in very severe perfect black, marvellous lines, waiting to be sculpted.

He told her so.

She pursed her lips.

They sat in front of the fire in the hall.

"Tell me a little more about your husband?" he said.

"What can I tell you? I know him so well. You see, I have loved him and hated him--I have become indifferent to him--and I appreciate him. But I have had nothing from him that a hundred other people have not had--except, perhaps, his name."

"Marly?"

She looked at him in amazement.

"Marly?" she laughed. "Marly is not even my own name. We are all of us so very monogamous when we love, proprietary, exclusive, jealous, whatever you like to call it. Edmond's character was like a pergola. You walked in and out. There were always roses and jasmine, clematis and wisteria, peeps of the garden and patches of the sky--but never a shut door--never one. Oh," there was a breaking passion in her voice--"how I longed for four walls, for a lock and key, for a dungeon, for bars. 'Don't you know,' I would say to him, 'that much trodden territory becomes neutral?' and he would smile and say, 'you are generous.'"

Maurice was looking into the fire.

"Poor little Paula," he said. "But you were his only wife."

"Yes," she said, "a law-given copyright."

"Paula," he said, "will you do something for me?"

"I wonder. There are surely no somethings where we are concerned."

"I want you to describe several dresses to me. Your own perfect divine

dresses. I want them for my book."

"So I am to be made use of, am I?"

Her eyes were flashing.

He was not looking at her.

"Yes," he said, "I am going to steal some of your genius."

She had left him. He was not surprised. She never said "Good-night."

The next day she had gone--very early, leaving no address, no letter.

She had, he heard, left his box of flowers at the village infirmary. He knew that that day it was to have been full of verbena, sweet geranium, sweet briar, thyme, myrtle, lavender and single roses....

* * * * *

Marthe had insisted that he should come with her to Lally. He was feeling foolish and fascinated--dressing was evidently a religion with the most solemn rites in the world. The gravity and concentration of every one astounded him--the firm vendeuse refusing to allow her cliente any freedom of choice. The pathetic cliente pining in vain for forbidden fruit--the hopelessly ugly and unrewarding, who alone were permitted to follow their fancies. Patterns were discussed in hushed but intense undertones, faint but all-important modifications were offered by the vendeuse to bridge the gulf between the figures of the mannequins and those of the clients. The brave longing of a squat pigeon to have the model reproduced "textuellement" was resolutely suppressed.

Marthe was discussing her vendeuse's child....

And then suddenly Maurice saw Madame Marly. She was without a hat and scattering her terrified staff with her eye.

She came straight to him, her voice was mocking.

"Maintenant, je peux donner des renseignements à Monsieur."

"I did not know," he blurted, "I had no idea," and then as the ultimate significance of their meeting disentangled itself from the immediate embarrassment,

"Thank God, I have found you."

* * * * *

Mlle. de Marveau married the Comte de Cély.

The Comtesse de Cély wanted an escape and became Madame Lalli.

Madame Lalli wanted an escape and became Madame Marly--for Paula was always Paula.

And then she met Maurice and her youth. Twenty-five years of age and experience and disappointment fell from her. But to keep her great illusion she offered her big resistance....

And then the tiny knife turned in the tiny wound. The unconscious buzzing machine touched the exposed nerve--the silly, absurd, irrelevant name.

The lover in pursuit of the beloved became the novelist examining the dressmaker, seeking for information. When professional meets professional.

This time she capitulated for she ran away.

* * * * *

That night Maurice wrote to her.

"Paula, I love you. I loved you always. I loved you invulnerable, wise, fortified beyond the wiles of men. How much more do I love you now with your one weak spot--so weak, so absurd that it can only be kissed, and laughed at and adored.

"Paula, my own, the twenty-five years have never existed. There is only one immortal moment--and that is to come.

"Beloved, best beloved, only beloved, I want you so badly.

"MAURICE.

"Besides, you have got to describe me several dresses for my new book."



THE MASS FOR THE DEAD

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of **Grim Tales**, by Edith Nesbit

I was awake--widely, cruelly awake. I had been awake all night; what sleep could there be for me when the woman I loved was to be married next morning--married, and not to me?

I went to my room early; the family party in the drawing-room maddened me. Grouped about the round table with the stamped plush cover, each was busy with work, or book, or newspaper, but not too busy to stab my heart through and through with their talk of the wedding.

Her people were near neighbours of mine, so why should her marriage not be canvassed in my home circle?

They did not mean to be cruel; they did not know that I loved her; but she knew it. I told her, but she knew it before that. She knew it from the moment when I came back from three years of musical study in Germany--came back and met her in the wood where we used to go nutting when we were children.

I looked into her eyes, and my whole soul trembled with thankfulness that I was living in a world that held her also. I turned and walked by her side, through the tangled green wood, and we talked of the long-ago days, and it was, "Have you forgotten?" and "Do you remember?" till we reached her garden gate. Then I said--

"Good-bye; no, _auf wiedersehn_, and in a very little time, I hope."

And she answered--

"Good-bye. By the way, you haven't congratulated me yet."

"Congratulated you?"

"Yes, did I not tell you I am to marry Mr. Benoliel next month?"

And she turned away, and went up the garden slowly.

I asked my people, and they said it was true. Kate, my dear playfellow, was to marry this Spaniard, rich, wilful, accustomed to win, polished in manners and base in life. Why was she to marry him?

"No one knows," said my father, "but her father is talked about in the city, and Benoliel, the Spaniard, is rich. Perhaps that's it."

That was it. She told me so when, after two weeks spent with her and near her, I implored her to break so vile a chain and to come to me, who loved her--whom she loved.

"You are quite right," she said calmly. We were sitting in the window-seat of the oak parlour in her father's desolate old house. "I do love you, and I shall marry Mr. Benoliel."

"Why?"

"Look around you and ask me why, if you can."

I looked around--on the shabby, bare room, with its faded hangings of sage-green moreen, its threadbare carpet, its patched, washed-out chintz chair-covers. I looked out through the square, latticed window at the ragged, unkempt lawn, at her own gown--of poor material, though she wore it as queens might desire to wear ermine--and I understood.

Kate is obstinate; it is her one fault; I knew how vain would be my entreaties, yet I offered them; how unavailing my arguments, yet they were set forth; how useless my love and my sorrow, yet I showed them to her.

"No," she answered, but she flung her arms round my neck as she spoke, and held me as one may hold one's best treasure. "No, no; you are poor, and he is rich. You wouldn't have me break my father's heart: he's so proud, and if he doesn't get some money next month, he will be ruined. I'm not deceiving any one. Mr. Benoliel knows I don't care for him; and if I marry him, he is going to advance my father a large sum of money. Oh, I assure you that everything has been talked over and settled. There is no going from it."

"Child! child!" I cried, "how calmly you speak of it! Don't you see that you are selling your soul and throwing mine away?"

"Father Fabian says I am doing right," she answered, unclasping her hands, but holding mine in them, and looking at me with those clear, grey eyes of hers. "Are we to be unselfish in everything else, and in love to think only of our own happiness? I love you, and I shall marry him. Would you rather the positions were reversed?"

"Yes," I said, "for then I would make you love me."

"Perhaps he will," she said bitterly. Even in that moment her mouth trembled with the ghost of a smile. She always loved to tease. She goes through more moods in a day than most other women in a year. Drowning the smile came tears, but she controlled them, and she said--

"Good-bye; you see I am right, don't you? Oh, Jasper, I wish I hadn't told you I loved you. It will only make you more unhappy."

"It makes my one happiness," I answered; "nothing can take that from me. And that happiness he will never have. Say again that you love me!"

"I love you! I love you! I love you!"

With further folly of tears and mad loving words we parted, and I bore my heartache away, leaving her to bear hers into her new life.

And now she was to be married to-morrow, and I could not sleep.

When the darkness became unbearable I lighted a candle, and then lay staring vacantly at the roses on the wall-paper, or following with my eyes the lines and curves of the heavy mahogany furniture.

The solidity of my surroundings oppressed me. In the dull light the wardrobe loomed like a hearse, and my violin case looked like a child's coffin.

I reached a book and read till my eyes ached and the letters danced a pas fantastique up and down the page.

I got up and had ten minutes with the dumbbells. I sponged my face and hands with cold water and tried again to sleep--vainly. I lay there, miserably wide awake.

I tried to say poetry, the half-forgotten tasks of my school days even, but through everything ran the refrain--

"Kate is to be married to-morrow, and not to me, not to me!"

I tried counting up to a thousand. I tried to imagine sheep in a lane, and to count them as they jumped through a gap in an imaginary hedge--all the time-honoured spells with which sleep is wooed--vainly.

Then the Waits came, and a torture to the nerves was superadded to the torture of the heart. After fifteen minutes of carols every fibre of me seemed vibrating in an agony of physical misery.

To banish the echo of "The Mistletoe Bough," I hummed softly to myself a melody of Palestrina's, and felt more awake than ever.

Then the thing happened which nothing will ever explain. As I lay there I heard, breaking through and gradually overpowering the air I was suggesting, a harmony which I had never heard before, beautiful beyond description, and as distinct and definite as any song man's ears have ever listened to.

My first half-formed thought was, "more Waits," but the music was choral music, true and sweet; with it mingled an organ's notes, and with every note the music grew in volume. It is absurd to suggest that I dreamed it, for, still hearing the music, I leaped out of bed and opened the window. The music grew fainter. There was no one to be seen in the snowy garden below. Shivering, I shut the window. The music grew more distinct, and I became aware that I was listening to a mass--a funeral mass, and one which I had never heard before. I lay in my bed and followed the whole course of the office.

The music ceased.

I was sitting up in bed, my candle alight, and myself as wide awake as ever, and more than ever possessed by the thought of _her_.

But with a difference. Before, I had only mourned the loss of her: now, my thoughts of her were mingled with an indescribable dread. The sense of death and decay that had come to me with that strange, beautiful music, coloured all my thoughts. I was filled with fancies of hushed houses, black garments, rooms where white flowers and white linen lay in a deathly stillness. I heard echoes of tears, and of dim-voiced bells tolling monotonously. I shivered, as it were on the brink of irreparable woe, and in its contemplation I watched the dull dawn slowly overcome the pale flame of my candle, now burnt down into its socket.

I felt that I must see Kate once again before she gave herself away. Before ten o'clock I was in the oak parlour. She came to me. As she entered the room, her pallor, her swollen eyelids and the misery in her eyes wrung my heart as even that night of agony had not done. I literally could not speak. I held out my hands.

Would she reproach me for coming to her again, for forcing upon her a second time the anguish of parting?

She did not. She laid her hands in mine, and said--

"I am thankful you have come; do you know, I think I am going mad? Don't let me go mad, Jasper."

The look in her eyes underlined her words.

I stammered something and kissed her hands. I was with her again, and joy fought again with grief.

"I must tell some one. If I am mad, don't lock me up. Take care of me, won't you?"

Would I not?

"Understand," she went on, "it was not a dream. I was wide awake, thinking of you. The Waits had not long gone, and I--I was looking at your likeness. I was not asleep."

I shivered as I held her fast.

"As Heaven sees us, I did not dream it. I heard a mass sung, and, Jasper, it was a mass for the dead. I followed the office. You are not a Catholic, but I thought--I feared--oh, I don't know what I thought. I am thankful there is nothing wrong with you."

I felt a sudden certainty, and complete sense of power possess me. Now, in this her moment of weakness, while she was so completely under the influence of a strong emotion, I could and would save her from Benoliel, and myself from life-long pain.

"Kate," I said, "I believe it is a warning. You shall not marry this man. You shall marry me, and none other."

She leaned her head against my shoulder; she seemed to have forgotten her father and all the reasons for her marriage with Benoliel.

"You don't think I'm mad? No? Then take care of me; take me away; I feel safe with you."

Thus all obstacles vanished in less time than the length of a lover's kiss. I dared not stop to consider the coincidence of supernatural warning--nor what it might mean. Face to face with crowned hope, I am proud to remember that common sense held her own. The room in which we were had a French window. I fetched her garden hat and a shawl from the hall, and we went out through the still, white garden. We did not meet a soul. When we reached my father's garden I took her in by the back way, to the summer-house, and left her, though I was half afraid to leave her, while I went into the house. I snatched my violin and cheque book, took all my spare money, scrawled a line to my father and rejoined her.

Still no one had seen us.

We walked to a station five miles away; and by the time Benoliel would reach the church, I was leaving Doctors' Commons with a special licence in my pocket. Two hours later Kate was my wife, and we were quietly and prosaically eating our wedding-breakfast in the dining-room of the Grand Hotel.

"And where shall we go?" I said.

"I don't know," she answered, smiling; "you have not much money, have you?"

"Oh dear me, yes. I'm not rich, but I'm not absolutely a church mouse."

"Could we go to Devonshire?" she asked, twisting her new ring round and round.

"Devonshire! Why, that is where----"

"Yes, I know: Benoliel arranged to go there. Jasper, I am afraid of Benoliel."

"Then why----"

"Foolish person," she answered. "Do you think that Benoliel will be likely to go to Devonshire _now_?"

We went to Devonshire--I had had a small legacy a few months earlier, and I did not permit money cares to trouble my new and beautiful happiness. My only fear was that she would be saddened by thoughts of her father; but I am thankful to remember that in those first days she, too, was happy--so happy that there seemed to be hardly room in her mind for any thought but of me. And every hour of every day I said to my soul--

"But for that portent, whatever it boded, she might have been not my wife but his."

The first four or five days of our marriage are flowers that memory keeps always fresh. Kate's face had recovered its wild-rose bloom, and she laughed and sang and jested and enjoyed all our little daily adventures with the fullest, freest-hearted gaiety. Then I committed the supreme imbecility of my life--one of those acts of folly on which one looks back all one's life with a half stamp of the foot, and the unanswerable question, "How on earth could I have been such a fool?"

We were sitting in a little sitting-room, hideous in intention, but redeemed by blazing fire and the fact that two were there, sitting hand-in-hand, gazing into the fire and talking of their future and of their love. There was nothing to trouble us; no one had discovered our whereabouts, and my wife's fear of Benoliel's revenge seemed to have dissolved before the flame of our happiness.

And as we sat there, peaceful and untroubled, the Imp of the Perverse jogged my elbow, as, alas! he does so often, and I was moved to tell my wife that I, too, had heard that unearthly midnight music--that her hearing of it was not, as she had grown to think, a mere nightmare--a strange dream--but something more strange, more significant. I told her

how I had heard the mass for the dead, and all the tale of that night. She listened silently, and I thought her strangely indifferent. When I had finished, she took her hand from mine and covered her face.

"I believe it was a warning to us to flee temptation. We ought never to have married. Oh, my poor father!"

Her tone was one that I had never heard before. Its hopeless misery appalled me. And justly. For no arguments, no entreaties, no caresses, could win my wife back to the mood of an hour before.

She tried to be cheerful, but her gaiety was forced, and her laughter stung my heart.

She spoke no more about the music, and when I tried to reason with her about it she smiled a gloomy little smile, and said--

"I cannot be happy. I will not be happy. It is wrong. I have been very selfish and wicked. You think me very idiotic, I know, but I believe there is a curse on us. We shall never be happy again."

"Don't you love me any more?" I asked like a fool.

"Love you?" She only repeated my words, but I was satisfied on that score. But those were miserable days. We loved each other passionately, yet our hours were spent like those of lovers on the eve of parting. Long, long silences took the place of foolish little jokes and childish talk which happy lovers know. And more than once, waking in the night, I heard my wife sobbing, and feigned sleep, with the bitter knowledge that I had no power to comfort her. I knew that the thought of her father was with her always, and that her anxiety about him grew, day by day. I wore myself out in trying to think of some way to divert her thoughts from him. I could not, indeed, pay his debts, but I could have him to live with us, a much greater sacrifice; and having a good connection, both as a musician and composer, I did not doubt that I could support her and him in comfort.

But Kate had made up her mind that the disgrace of bankruptcy would break her father's heart; and my Kate is not easy to convince or persuade.

At Torquay it occurred to me that perhaps it would be well for her to see a priest. True, Father Fabian had counselled her to marry Benoliel, but I could hardly believe that most priests would advise a girl to marry a bad man, whom she did not love, for the sake of any worldly gain whatsoever.

She received the suggestion with favour, but without enthusiasm, and we sought out a Catholic church to make inquiries. As we opened the outer door of the church we heard music, and as we stood in the entrance and

I laid my hand on the heavy inner door, my other hand was caught by Kate.

"Jasper," she whispered, "it is the same!"

Some person opening the door behind us compelled us to move forward. In another moment we stood in the dusky church--stood hand-in-hand in dim daylight, listening to the same music that each had heard in the lonely night on the eve of our wedding.

I put my arm round my wife and drew her back.

"Come away, my darling," I whispered; "it is a funeral service."

She turned her eyes on me. "I _must_ understand, I must see who it is. I shall go mad if you take me away now. I cannot bear any more."

We walked up the aisle, and placed ourselves as near as possible to the spot where the coffin lay, covered with flowers and with tapers burning about it. And we heard that music again, every note of it the same that each had heard before. And when the service was over I whispered to the sacristan--

"Whose music was that?"

"Our organist's," he answered; "it is the first time they've had it. Fine, wasn't it?"

"Who is the--who was--who is being buried?"

"A foreign gentleman, sir; they do say as his lady as was to be gave him the slip on his wedding day, and he'd given her father thousands they say, if the truth was known."

"But what was he doing here?"

"Well, that's the curious part, sir. To show his independence, what does he do but go the same tour he'd planned for his wedding trip. And there was a railway accident, and him and every one in his carriage killed in a twinkling, so to speak. Lucky for the young lady she was off with somebody else."

The sacristan laughed softly to himself.

Kate's fingers gripped my arm.

"What was his name?" she asked.

I would not have asked: I did not wish to hear it.

"Benoliel," said the sacristan. "Curious name and curious tale. Every one's talking of it."

Every one had something else to talk of when it was found that Benoliel's pride, which had permitted him to buy a wife, had shrunk from reclaiming the purchase money when the purchase was lost to him. And to the man who had been willing to sell his daughter, the retention of her price seemed perfectly natural.

From the moment when she heard Benoliel's name on the sacristan's lips, all Kate's gaiety and happiness returned. She loved me, and she hated Benoliel. She was married to me, and he was dead; and his death was far more of a shock to me than to her. Women are curiously kind and curiously cruel. And she never could see why her father should not have kept the money. It is noteworthy that women, even the cleverest and the best of them, have no perception of what men mean by honour.

How do I account for the music? My good critic, my business is to tell my story--not to account for it.

And do I not pity Benoliel? Yes. I can afford, now, to pity most men, alive or dead.



TISH DOES HER BIT

from The Project Gutenberg eBook, **More Tish**, by Mary Roberts Rinehart

From the very beginning of the war Tish was determined to go to France. But she is a truthful woman, and her age kept her from being accepted. She refused, however, to believe that this was the reason, and blamed her rejection on Aggie and myself.

"Age fiddlesticks!" she said, knitting violently. "The plain truth is--and you might as well acknowledge it, Lizzie--that they would take

me by myself quick enough, just to get the ambulance I've offered, if for no other reason. But they don't want three middle-aged women, and I don't know that I blame them."

That was during September, I think, and Tish had just received her third rejection. They were willing enough to take the ambulance, but they would not let Tish drive it. I am quite sure it was September, for I remember that Aggie was having hay fever at the time, and she fell to sneezing violently.

Tish put down her knitting and stared at Aggie fixedly until the paroxysm was over.

"Exactly," she observed, coldly. "Imagine me creeping out onto a battlefield to gather up the wounded, and Aggie crawling behind, going off like an alarm clock every time she met a clump of golden rod, or whatever they have in France to produce hay fever."

"I could stay in the ambulance, Tish," Aggie protested.

"I understand," Tish went on, in an inflexible tone, "that those German snipers have got so that they shoot by ear. One sneeze would probably be fatal. Not only that," she went on, turning to me, "but you know perfectly well, Lizzie, that a woman of your weight would be always stepping on brush and sounding like a night attack."

"Not at all," I replied, slightly ruffled. "And for a very good reason. I should not be there. As to my weight, Tish, my mother was always considered merely a fine figure of a woman, and I am just her size. It is only since this rage for skinny women----"

But Tish was not listening. She drew a deep sigh, and picked up her knitting again.

"We'd better not discuss it," she said. But in these days of efficiency it seems a mistake that a woman who can drive an ambulance and can't turn the heel of a stocking properly to save her life, should be knitting socks that any soldier with sense would use to clean his gun with, or to tie around a sore throat, but never to wear.

It was, I think, along in November that Charlie Sands, Tish's nephew, came to see me. He had telephoned, and asked me to have Aggie there. So I called her up, and told her to buy some cigarettes on the way. I remember that she was very irritated when she arrived, although the very soul of gentleness usually.

She came in and slammed a small package onto my table.

"There!" she said. "And don't ever ask me to do such a thing again. The man in the shop winked at me when I said they were not for myself."

However, Aggie is never angry for any length of time, and a moment later she was remarking that Mr. Wiggins had always been a smoker, and that one of his workmen had blamed his fatal accident on the roof to smoke from his pipe getting into his eyes.

Shortly after that I was surprised to find her in tears.

"I was just thinking, Lizzie," she said. "What if Mr. Wiggins had lived, and we had had a son, and he had decided to go and fight!"

She then broke down and sobbed violently, and it was some time before I could calm her. Even then it was not the fact that she had no son which calmed her.

"Of course I'm silly, Lizzie," she said. "I'll stop now. Because of course they don't _all_ get killed, or even wounded. He'd probably come out all right, and every one says the training is fine for them."

Charlie Sands came in shortly after, and having kissed us both and tried on a night shirt I was making for the Red Cross, and having found the cookie jar in the pantry and brought it into my sitting room, sat down and came to business.

"Now," he said. "What's she up to?"

He always referred to Tish as "she," to Aggie and myself.

"She has given up going to France," I replied.

"Perhaps! What does Hannah report?"

I am sorry to say that, fearing Tish's impulsive nature, we had felt obliged to have Hannah watch her carefully. Tish has a way of breaking out in unexpected places, like a boil, as Charlie Sands once observed, and by knowing her plans in advance we have sometimes prevented her acting in a rash manner. Sometimes, not always.

"Hannah says everything is quiet," Aggie said. "Dear Tish has apparently given up all thought of going abroad. At least, Hannah says she no longer practises first aid on her. Not since the time Tish gave her an alcohol bath and she caught cold. Hannah says she made her lie uncovered, with the window open, so the alcohol would evaporate. But she gave notice the next day, which was ungrateful of her, for Tish sat up all night feeding her things out of her First Aid case, and if she _did_ give her a bit of iodine by mistake----"

"She is no longer interested in First Aid," I broke in. Aggie has a way of going on and on, and it was not necessary to mention the matter of the iodine. "I know that, because I blistered my hand over there the

other day, and she merely told me to stick it in the baking soda jar."

"That's curious," said Charlie Sands.

"Because---- Great Scott, what's wrong with these cigarettes?"

"They are violet-scented," Aggie explained. "The smell sticks so, and Lizzie is fond of violet."

However, he did not seem to care for them, and appeared positively ashamed. He opened a window, although it was cold outside, and shook himself in front of it like a dog. But all he said was:

"I am a meek person, Aunt Lizzie, and I like to humor whims when I can. But the next time you have a male visitor and offer him a cigarette, for the love of Mike don't tell him those brazen gilt-tipped incense things are mine."

He then ate nine cookies, and explained why he had come.

"I don't like the look of things, beloved and respected spinsters," he said. "I fear my revered aunt is again up to mischief. You haven't heard her say anything more about aeroplanes, have you?"

"No," I replied, for us both.

"Or submarines?"

"She's been taking swimming lessons again," I said, thoughtfully.

"Lizzie!" Aggie cried. "Oh, my poor Tish!"

"I think, however," said Charlie Sands, "that it is not a submarine. There are no submarine flivvers, as I understand it, and a full-size one would run into money. No, I hardly think so. The fact remains, however, that my respected and revered aunt has made away with about seven thousand dollars' worth of bonds that were, until a short time ago, giving semi-annual birth to plump little coupons. The question is, what is she up to?"

But we were unable to help him, and at last he went away. His parting words were:

"Well, there is something in the air, and the only thing to do, I suppose, is to wait until it drops. But when my beloved female relative takes to selling bonds without consulting me, and goes out, as I met her yesterday, with her hat on front side behind, there is something in the wind. I know the symptoms."

Aggie and I kept a close watch on Tish after that, but without result,

unless the following incident may be called a result. Although it was rather a cause, after all, for it brought Mr. Culver into our lives.

I think it important to relate it in detail, as in a way it vindicates Tish in her treatment of Mr. Culver, although I do not mean by this statement that there was anything of personal malice in the incident of June fifth of this year. Those of us who know Tish best realize that she needs no defence. Her motives are always of the highest, although perhaps the matter of the police officer was ill-advised. But now that the story is out, and Mr. Ostermaier very uneasy about the wrong name being on the marriage license, I think an explanation will do dear Tish no harm.

I should explain, then, that Tish has retained the old homestead in the country, renting it to a reliable family. And that it has been our annual custom to go there for chestnuts each autumn. On the Sunday following Charlie Sands' visit, therefore, while Aggie and I were having dinner with Tish, I suggested that we make our annual pilgrimage the following day.

"What pilgrimage?" Tish demanded. She was at that time interested in seeing if a table could be set for thirty-five cents a day per person, and the meal was largely beans.

"For chestnuts," I explained.

"I don't think I'll go this year," Tish observed, not looking at either of us. "I'm not a young woman, and climbing a chestnut tree requires youth."

"You could get the farmer's boy," Aggie suggested, hopefully. Aggie is a creature of habit, and clings hard to the past.

"The farmer is not there any more."

We stared at her in amazement, but she was helping herself to boiled dandelion at the time, and made no further explanation.

"Why, Tish!" Aggie exclaimed.

"Aggie," she observed, severely, "if you would only remember that the world is hungry, you would eat your crusts."

"I ate crusts for twenty years," said Aggie, "because I'd been raised to believe they would make my hair curl. But I've come to a time of life when my digestion means more to me than my looks. And since I've had the trouble with my teeth----"

"Teeth or no teeth," said Tish, firmly, "eating crusts is a patriotic duty, Aggie."

She was clearly disinclined to explain about the farm, but on being pressed said she had sent the tenants away because they kept pigs, which was absurd and she knew it.

"Isn't keeping pigs a patriotic duty?" Aggie demanded, glancing at me across the table. But Tish ignored the question.

"What about the church?" I asked.

Tish has always given the farm money to missions, and is therefore Honorary President of the Missionary Society. She did not reply immediately as she was pouring milk over her cornstarch at the time, but Hannah, her maid, spoke up rather bitterly.

"If we give the heathen what we save on the table, Miss Lizzie," she said, "I guess they'll do pretty well. I'm that fed up with beans that my digestion is all upset. I have to take baking soda after my meals, regular."

Tish looked up at her sharply.

"Entire armies fight on beans," she said

"Yes'm," said Hannah. "I'd fight on 'em too. That's the way they make me feel. And if a German bayonet is any worse than the colic I get----"

"Leave the room," said Tish, in a furious voice, and finished her cornstarch in silence.

But she is a just woman, and although firm in her manner, she is naturally kind. After dinner, seeing that Aggie was genuinely disappointed about the excursion to the farm, she relented and observed that we would go to the farm as usual.

"After all," she said, "chestnuts are nourishing, and might take the place of potatoes in a pinch."

Here we heard a hollow groan from the pantry, but on Tish demanding its reason Hannah said, meekly enough, that she had knocked her crazy bone, and Tish, with her usual magnanimity, did not pursue the subject.

There was a heavy frost that night, and two days later Tish called me up and fixed the following day for the visit to the farm. On looking back, I am inclined to think that her usual enthusiasm was absent, but we suspected nothing. She said that Hannah would put up the luncheon, and that she had looked up the food value of chestnuts and that it was enormous. She particularly requested that Aggie should not bake a cake for the picnic, as has been her custom.

"Cakes," she said, "are a reckless extravagance. In butter, eggs and flour a single chocolate layer cake could support three men at the front for two days, Lizzie," she said.

I repeated this to Aggie, and she was rather resentful. Aggie, I regret to say, has rather a weakness for good food.

"Humph!" she said, bitterly. "Very well, Lizzie. But if she expects me to go out like Balaam's ass and eat dandelions, I'd rather starve."

Neither Aggie nor I is inclined to be suspicious, and although we noticed Tish's rather abstracted expression that morning, we laid it to the fact that Charlie Sands had been talking about going to the American Ambulance in France, which Tish opposed violently, although she was more than anxious to go herself.

Aggie put in her knitting bag the bottle of blackberry cordial without which we rarely travel, as we find it excellent in case of chilling, or indigestion, and even to rub on hornet stings. I was placing the suitcase, in which it is our custom to carry the chestnuts, in the back of the car, when I spied a very small parcel. Aggie saw it too.

"If that's the lunch, Tish," she said, "I don't know that I care to go."

"You can eat chestnuts," said Tish, shortly. "But don't go on my account. It looks like rain anyhow, and the last time I went to the farm in the mud I skidded down a hill backwards and was only stopped by running into a cow that thought I was going the other way."

"Nonsense, Tish," I said. "It hasn't an idea of raining. And if the lunch isn't sufficient, there are generally some hens from the Knowles place that lay in your barn, aren't there?"

"Certainly not," she said stiffly, although it wasn't three months since she had threatened to charge the Knowleses rent for their chickens.

Well, I was puzzled. It is not like Tish to be irritable without reason, although she has undoubtedly a temper. She was most unpleasant on the way out, remarking that if the Ostermaiers's maid continued to pare away half the potatoes, as any fool could see around their garbage can, she thought the church should reduce his salary. She also stated flatly that she considered that the nation would be better off if some one would uncork a gas bomb in the Capitol at Washington, in spite of the fact that my second cousin, once removed, the Honorable J. C. Willoughby, represents his country in its legislative halls.

It is always a bad sign when Tish talks politics, especially since the income tax.

Although it had no significance for us at the time, she did not put her

car in the barn as she usually does, but left it in the road. The house was closed, and there was no cool and refreshing buttermilk with which to wash down our frugal repast, which we ate on the porch, as Tish did not offer to unlock the house. Frugal repast it was indeed, consisting of lettuce sandwiches made without butter, as Tish considered that both butter and lettuce was an extravagance. There were, of course, also beans.

Now as it happens, Aggie is not strong and requires palatable as well as substantial food to enable her to get about, especially to climb trees. We missed her during the meal, and I saw that she was going toward the barn. Tish saw it also, and called to her sharply.

"I am going to get an egg," Aggie replied, with gentle obstinacy. "I am starving, Tish, and I am certain I heard a hen cackle. Probably one of the Knowles's chickens----"

"If it is a Knowles's chicken," Tish said, virtuously, "its egg is a Knowles's egg, and we have no right to it."

I am sorry to relate that here Aggie said: "Oh, rats!" but as she apologized immediately, and let the egg drop, figuratively, of course, peace again hovered over our little party. Only momentarily, however, for, a short time after, a hen undoubtedly cackled, and Aggie got up with an air of determination.

"Tish," she said, "that may be a Knowles's hen or it may be one belonging to this farm. I don't know, and I don't give a--I don't care. I'm going to get it."

"The barn's locked," said Tish.

"I could get in through a window."

I shall never forget Tish's look of scorn as she rose with dignity, and stalked toward the barn.

"I shall go myself, Aggie," she said, as she passed her. "You would probably fall in the rain barrel under the window. You're no climber. And you might as well eat those crusts you've hidden under the porch, if you're as hungry as you make out you are."

"Lizzie," Aggie hissed, when Tish was out of hearing, "_what is in that barn?_"

"It may be anything from a German spy to an aeroplane," I said. "But it's not your business or mine."

"You needn't be so dratted virtuous," Aggie observed, scooping a hole in the petunia bed and burying the crusts in it. "Whatever's on her mind is

in that barn."

"Naturally," I observed. "While Tish is in it!"

Tish returned in a short time with one egg, which she placed on the porch floor without a word. But as she made no effort to give Aggie the house key, and as Aggie has never learned to swallow a raw egg, although I have heard that they taste rather like oysters, and slip down in much the same way, Aggie was obliged to continue hungry.

It is only just to record that Tish grew more companionable after luncheon, and got into a large chestnut tree near the house by climbing on top of the hen house. We had always before had the farmer's boy to do the climbing into the upper branches, and I confess to a certain nervousness, especially as Tish, when far above the ground, decided to take off her dress skirt, which was her second best tailor-made, and climb around in her petticoats.

She had to have both hands free to unhook the band, and she very nearly overbalanced while stepping out of it.

"Drat a woman's clothes, anyhow," she said. "If we had any sense we'd wear trousers."

"I understand," I said, "that even trousers are not easy to get out of, Tish."

"Don't be a fool, Lizzie," she said tartly. "If I had trousers on I wouldn't have to take them off. Catch it!"

However, the skirt did not fall clear, but caught on a branch far out, and hung there. Tish broke off a small limb and poked at it from above, and I found a paling from a fence and threw it up to dislodge it. But it stuck tight, and the paling came down and struck Aggie on the head. Had we only known it, this fortunate accident probably saved Aggie's life, for she sat down suddenly on the ground, and said faintly that her skull was fractured.

I was bending over Aggie when I heard a sharp crack from above. I looked up, and Tish was lying full length on a limb, her arm out to reach for the skirt and a most terrible expression on her face. There was another crack, and our poor Tish came hurtling through the air, landing half in Aggie's lap and half in the suitcase.

I was quite unable to speak, and owing, as I learned later, to Tish's head catching her near the waist line, Aggie had no breath even to scream.

There was a dreadful silence. Then Tish said, without moving:

"All my property is to go to Charlie Sands."

"Tish!" I cried, in an agony, and Aggie, who still could not speak, burst into tears.

However, a moment later, Tish drew up first one limb and then the other, and observed that her back was broken. She then mentioned that Aggie was to have her cameo set and the dining room sideboard, and that I was to have the automobile, but the next instant she felt a worm on her neck and sat up, looking rather dishevelled, but far from death.

"Where are you hurt, Tish?" I asked, trembling.

"Everywhere," she replied. "Everywhere, Lizzie. Every bone in my body is broken."

But after a time the aching localized itself in her right arm, which began to swell. We led her down to the creek and got her to hold it in the cold water and Aggie, being still nervous and unsteady, slipped on a mossy stone and sat down in about a foot of water. It was then that our dear Tish became like herself again, for Aggie was shocked into saying, "Oh, damn!" and Tish gave her a severe lecture on profanity.

Tish was quite sure her arm was broken, as well as all the ribs on one side. But she is a brave woman and made little fuss, although she kept poking a finger into her flesh here and there.

"Because," she said, "the First Aid book says that if a lung is punctured the air gets into the tissues, and they crackle on pressure."

It was soon after this that I saw Aggie, who had made no complaint about Tish falling on her, furtively testing her own tissues to see if they crackled.

Leaving my injured there by the creek, I went back to the tree and secured my paling again. By covering it with straw from the barn I was quite sure I could make a comfortable splint for Tish's arm. However, I had but just reached the barn and was preparing to crawl through a window by standing on a rain barrel when I saw Tish limping after me.

"Well?" she said. "What idiotic idea is in your head, Lizzie? Because if it is more eggs----"

"I am going to get some straw and make a splint."

"Nonsense. What for?"

"What do you suppose I intend it for?" I demanded, tartly. "To trim a hat?"

"I won't have a splint."

"Very well," I retorted. "Then I shall get some straw and start a fire to dry Aggie out."

"You'll stick in that window," Tish said, in what, in a smaller woman, would have been a vicious tone.

"Look here, Tish," I said, balancing on the edge of the rain barrel, "is there something in this barn you do not wish me to see?"

She looked at me steadily.

"Yes," she said. "There is, Lizzie. And I'll ask you to promise on your honor not to mention it."

That promise I am glad to say I have kept until now, when the need of secrecy is past, Tish herself having divulged the truth. But at the time I was greatly agitated, and indeed almost fell into the rain barrel.

"Or try to find out what it is," Tish went on, sternly.

I promised, of course, and Tish relaxed somewhat, although I caught her eye on me once or twice, as though she was daring me to so much as guess at the secret.

"Of course, Lizzie," she said, as we approached Aggie, "it is nothing I am ashamed of."

"Of course not," I replied hastily. I took my courage in my hands and faced her. "Tish, have you an aeroplane hidden in that barn?"

"No," she replied promptly. She might have enlarged on her denial, but Aggie took a violent sneezing spell just then, pressing herself between paroxysms to see if she crackled, and we decided to go home at once.

Here a new difficulty presented itself. Tish could not drive the car! I shall never forget my anguish when she turned to me and said:

"You will have to drive us home, Lizzie."

"Never!" I cried.

"It's perfectly easy," she went on. "If children can run them, and the idiots they have in garages and on taxicabs----"

"Never," I said firmly. "It may be easy, but it took you six months, Tish Carberry, and three broken springs and any number of dead chickens and animals, besides the time you went through a bridge, and the night you drove off the end of a dock. It may be easy, but if it is, I'd

rather do something hard."

"I shall sit beside you, Lizzie," she said, in a patient voice. "I daresay you know which is your right foot and which is your left. If not, I can tell you. I shall say 'left' when I want you to push out the clutch, and 'right' for the brake. As for gears, I can change them for you with my left hand."

"I could do it sitting in a chair," I said, in a despairing voice. "But Tish," I said, in a last effort, "do you remember when you tried to teach me to ride a bicycle? And that the moment I saw something to avoid I made a mad dash for it?"

"This is different," Tish said. "It is a car----"

"And that I rode about a quarter of a mile into Lake Penzance, and would likely have ridden straight across if I hadn't run into a canoe and upset it?"

"You can always stop a car," said Tish. "Don't be a coward, Lizzie. All you have to do is to shove hard with your right foot."

Yet, when I did exactly that, she denied she had ever said it. Fond as I am of Tish, I must admit that she has a way of forgetting things she does not wish to remember.

In the end I consented. It was against my better judgment, and I warned Tish. I have no talent for machinery, but indeed a great fear of it, since the time when as a child I was visiting my grand-aunt's farm and almost lost a finger in a feed-cutter. In addition to that, Tish's accident and her secret had both unnerved me. I knew that calamity faced us as I took my place at the wheel.

Tish was still in her petticoat, as we were obliged to leave her dress skirt in the tree, and Aggie was wrapped in the rug to prevent her taking cold.

"When we meet a buggy," Tish said, "we'd better go past it rather fast. I don't ache to be seen in a seersucker petticoat."

"Fast," I said, bitterly. "You'd better pray that we go past it at all."

However, by going very slowly, I got the thing as far as the gate going into the road. Here there was a hill, and we began to move too rapidly.

"Slower," said Tish. "You've got to make a turn here."

"How?" I cried, frantically.

"Brake!" she yelled.

"Which foot?"

"Right foot. _Right foot!_"

However, it seems that my right foot was on the gas throttle at the time, which she had forgotten. I jammed my foot down hard, and the car seemed to lift out of the air. We went across the ditch, through a stake and rider fence, through a creek and up the other side of the bank, and brought up against a haystack with a terrific jolt.

Tish sat back and straightened her hat with a jerk.

"We'd better go back and do it again, Lizzie," she said, "because you missed one or two things."

"I did what you told me," I replied, sullenly.

"Did you?" said Tish. "I don't remember telling you to leap the creek. Of course, cross-country motoring has its advantages. Only one really should have solid tires, because barbed wire fences might be awkward."

She then sat back and rested.

"Well?" I said.

"Well?" said Tish.

"What am I to do now?"

"Oh!" she said. "I thought you preferred doing it your own way. I don't object, if you don't. You are quite right. Roads do become monotonous. Only I doubt, Lizzie, if you can get over this stack. You'd better go around it."

"Very well," I said. "My own way is to walk home, Tish Carberry. And if you think I am going to steer a runaway automobile you can think again."

Aggie had said nothing, but I now turned and saw her, pale and shaken, taking a sip of the blackberry cordial we always carry with us for emergencies. I suggested that she drive the thing home, but she only shook her head and muttered something about almost falling out of the back end of the car when we leaped up out of the creek. She had, she asserted, been clear up on the folded-back top, and had stayed there until the jolt against the haystack had thrown her forward into the seat again.

I daresay we would still be there had not a young man with a gun run suddenly around the haystack. He had a frightened look, but when he saw us all alive he relaxed. Unfortunately, however, Aggie still had the

bottle of blackberry cordial in the air. His expression altered when he saw her, and he said, in a disgusted voice:

"Well, I be damned!"

Tish had not seen Aggie, and merely observed that she felt like that and even more. She then remarked that I had broken her other arm, and her nose, which had struck the wind shield. But the young man merely gave her a scornful glance, and leaning his gun against the haystack, came over to the car and inspected us all with a most scornful expression.

"I thought so!" he said. "When I saw you leaping that fence and jumping the creek, I knew what was wrong. Only I thought it was a party of men. In my wildest dreams--give me that bottle," he ordered Aggie, holding out his hand.

Now it is Aggie's misfortune to have lost her own teeth some years ago, owing to a country dentist who did not know his business. And when excited she has a way of losing her hold, as one may say, on her upper set. She then speaks in a thick tone, with a lisp.

"Thertainly not!" said Aggie.

To my horror, the young man then stepped on the running board of the car and snatched the bottle out of her hand.

"I must say," he said, glaring at us each in turn, "that it is the most disgraceful thing I have ever seen." His eyes stopped at Tish, and traveled over her. "Where is your clothing?" he demanded, fiercely.

It was then that Tish rose and fixed him with a glittering eye.

"Young man," she said, "where my dress skirt is does not concern you. Nor why we are here as we are. Give Miss Pilkington that bottle of blackberry cordial."

"Blackberry cordial!" jeered the young man.

"As for what you evidently surmise, you are a young idiot. I am the President of the local branch of the W. C. T. U."

"Of course you are," said the young man. "I'm Carrie Nation myself. Now watch."

He then selected a large stone and smashed the bottle on it.

"Now," he observed, "come over with the rest of it, and be quick." But here he seemed to realize that Tish's face was rather awful, for he stopped bullying and began to coax. "Now see here," he said. "I'm going to help you out of this if I can, because I rather think it is an

accident. You've all had something on an empty stomach. Go down to the creek and get some cold water, and then walk about a bit. I'll see what I can do with the car."

Aggie was weeping in the rear seat by that time, and I shall never forget Tish's face. Suddenly she got out of the car and before he realized what was happening, she had his gun in her good hand.

"Now," she said, waving it about recklessly, "I'll teach you to insult sober and God-fearing women whose only fault is that one of them hasn't all the wit she should have and let a car run away with her. Lizzie, get out of that seat."

It was the young man's turn to look strange.

"Be careful!" he cried. "_Be careful!_ It's loaded, and the safety catch----"

"Get out, Aggie."

Aggie crawled out, still holding the rug around where she had sat down in the creek.

"Now," Tish said, addressing the stranger, "you back that car out and get it to the road. And close your mouth. Something is likely to fly into it."

"I beg of you!" said the young man. "Of course I'll do what I can, but--please don't wave that gun around."

"Just a moment," said Tish. "That blackberry cordial was worth about a dollar. Just give a dollar to the lady near you. Aggie, take that dollar. Lizzie, come here and let me rest this gun on your shoulder."

She did, keeping it pointed at the young man, and I could hear her behind me, breathing in short gasps of fury. Nothing could so have enraged Tish as the thing which had happened, and for a time I feared that she would actually do the young man some serious harm.

He sat there looking at us, and he saw, of course, that he had been mistaken. He grew very red, and said:

"I've been an idiot, of course. If you will allow me to apologize----"

"Don't talk," Tish snapped. "You have all you can do without any conversation. Did you ever drive a car before?"

"Not through a haystack," he said in a sulky voice.

But Tish fixed him with a glittering eye, and he started the engine.

Well, he got the car backed and turned around, and we followed him through the stubble as the car bumped and rocked along. But at the edge of the creek he stopped and turned around.

"Look here," he said. "This is suicide. This car will never do it."

"It has just done it," Tish replied, inexorably. "Go on."

"I might get down, but I'll never get up the other side."

"Go on."

"Tish!" Aggie cried, anguished. "He may be killed, and you'll be responsible."

Aggie is a sentimental creature, and the young man was very good-looking. Indeed, arriving at the brink, I myself had qualms. But Tish has a will of iron, and was, besides, still rankling with insult. She merely glued her eye again to the sight of the gun on my shoulder, and said:

"_Go on!_"

Well, he got the car down somehow or other, but nothing would make it climb the other side. It would go up a few feet and then slide back. And at last Tish herself saw that it was hopeless, and told him to turn and go down the creek bed.

It was a very rough creek bed, and one of the springs broke almost at once. We followed along the bank, and I think Tish found a sort of grim humor in seeing the young man bouncing up into the air and coming down on the wheel, for I turned once and found her smiling faintly. However, she merely called to him to be careful of the other springs or she would have to ask him to pay for them.

He stopped then, in a pool about two feet deep, and glared up at her.

"Oh, certainly," he said. "I suppose the fact that I have permanently bent in my floating ribs on this infernal wheel doesn't matter."

At last he came to a shelving bank, and got the car out. I think he contemplated making a run for it then and getting away, but Tish observed that she would shoot into the rear tires if he did so. So he went back to the road, slowly, and there stopped the car.

However, Tish was not through with him. She made him climb the chestnut tree and bring down her dress skirt, and then turn his back while she put it on. By that time, the young man was in a chastened mood, and he apologized handsomely.

"But I think I have made amends, ladies," he said. "I feel that I shall never be the same again. When I started out today I was a blithe young thing, feeling life in every limb, as the poet says. Now what I feel in every limb does not belong in verse. May I have the shotgun, please?"

But Tish had no confidence in him, and we took the gun with us, arranging to leave it at the first signpost, about a mile away. We left him there, and Aggie reported that he stood in the road staring after us as long as we were in sight.

Tish drove the car home after all, steering with one hand and taking the wheel off a buggy on the way. I sat beside her and changed the gears, and she blamed the buggy wheel on me, owing to my going into reverse when I meant to go ahead slowly. The result was that we began to back unexpectedly, and the man only saved his horse by jumping him over a watering trough.

I have gone into this incident with some care, because the present narrative concerns itself with the young man we met, and with the secret in Tish's barn. At the time, of course, it seemed merely one of the unpleasant things one wishes to forget quickly. Tish's arm was only sprained, and although Aggie wore adhesive plaster around her ribs almost all winter, because she was afraid to have it pulled off, there were no permanent ill effects.

The winter passed quietly enough. Aggie and I made Red Cross dressings for Europe, and Tish, tiring of knitting, made pajamas. She had turned against the government, and almost left the church when she learned that Mr. Ostermaier had voted the Democratic ticket. Then in January, without telling any one, she went away for four days, and Sarah Willoughby wrote me later that the Honorable J. C., her husband, said that a woman resembling Tish had demanded from the gallery of the Senate that we declare war against Germany and had been put out by the Sergeant-at-arms.

I do not know that this was Tish. She returned as unannounced as she had gone, and went back to her pajamas, but she was more quiet than usual, and sometimes, when she was sewing, her lips moved as though she was rehearsing a speech. She observed once or twice that she wanted to do her bit, but that she considered digging trenches considerably easier than driving a sewing machine twelve miles a day.

I remember, in this connection, a conversation I had with Mrs. Ostermaier some time in January. She asked me to wait after the Red Cross meeting, and I saw trouble in her eye.

"Miss Lizzie," she said, "do you think Miss Tish really enjoys sewing?"

"Not particularly," I admitted. "But it is better than knitting, she

says, because it is faster. She likes to get results."

"Exactly," Mrs. Ostermaier observed. "I'll just ask you to look at this pajama coat she has turned in."

Well, there was no getting away from it. It was wrong. Dear Tish had sewed one of the sleeves in the neck opening, and had opened the sleeve hole and faced back the opening and put buttons and buttonholes on it.

"Not only that," said Mrs. Ostermaier, "but she has made the trousers of several suits wrong side before and opened them up the back, and men are such creatures of habit. They like things the way they are used to them."

Well, I had to tell Tish, and she flew into a temper and said Mrs. Ostermaier never could cut things out properly, and she would leave the society. Which she did. But she was very unhappy over it, for Tish is patriotic to her finger tips.

All the spring, until war was declared, she was restless and discontented, and she took to long trips in the car, by herself, returning moodier than ever. But with the announcement of war she found work to do. She made enlisting speeches everywhere, and was very successful, because Tish has a magnetic and compelling eye, and she would fix on one man in the crowd and talk at him and to him until all the men around were watching him. Generally, with every one looking he was ashamed not to come forward, and Tish would take him by the arm and lead him in to the recruiting station.

It was on one of these occasions that we saw the young man of the blackberry cordial again.

Tish saw him first, from the tail of the wagon she was standing in. She fixed him with her eye at once, and a man standing near him, said:

"Go on in, boy. You're as good as in the trenches already. She landed me yesterday, but I've got six toes on one foot. Blessed if she didn't try to take me to a hospital to have one cut off."

"Now," said Tish, "does any one wish to ask any questions?"

I saw the blackberry cordial person take a step forward.

"I would like to ask you one," he said. "How do you reconcile blackberry cordial with the W. C. T. U.?"

Tish went white with anger, and would no doubt have flayed him with words, as our blackberry cordial is made from her own grandmother's recipe, and a higher principled woman never lived. But unluckily the driver of the furniture wagon we were standing in had returned without

our noticing it, and drove off at that moment, taking us with him.

It was about this time that Charlie Sands came to see me one day, looking worried.

"Look here," he said, "what's this about my having appendicitis?"

"Well, you ought to know," I replied rather tartly. "Don't ask me if you have a pain."

"But I haven't," he said, looking aggrieved. "I'm all right. I never felt better."

He then said that once, when a small boy, he had been taken with a severe attack of pain, following a picnic when he had taken considerable lemonade and pickles, followed by ice cream.

"I had forgotten it entirely," he went on. "But the other day Aunt Tish recalled the incident, and suggested that I get my appendix out. It wouldn't matter if she had let it go at that. But she's set on it. I may waken up any morning and find it gone."

I could only stare at him, for he is her favorite nephew, and I could not believe that she would forcibly immolate him on a bed of suffering.

"I used to think she was fond of me," he continued. "But she's--well, she's positively grewsome about the thing. She's talked so much about it that I begin to think I _have_ got a pain there. I'm not sure I haven't got it now."

Well, I couldn't understand it. I knew what she thought of him. Had she not, when she fell out of the tree, immediately left him all her property? I told him about that, and indeed about the entire incident, except the secret in the barn. He grew very excited toward the end, however, where we met the blackberry-cordial person, and interrupted me.

"I know it from there on," he said. "Only I thought Culver had made it up, especially about the gun being levelled at him, and the machine in the creek bed. He's on my paper; nice boy, too. Do you mean to say--but I might have known, of course."

He then laughed for a considerable time, although I do not consider the incident funny. But when I told him about Mr. Culver's impertinent question at the recruiting station, he sobered.

"You tell her to keep her hands off him," he said. "I need him in my business. And it won't take much to send him off to war, because he's had a disappointment in love and I'm told that he walks out in front of automobiles daily, hoping to be struck down and make the girl sorry."

"I consider her a very sensible young woman," I observed. But he was already back to his appendix.

"You see," he said, "my Aunt Letitia has a positively uncanny influence over me, and if I have it out I can't enlist. No scars taken."

I put down my knitting.

"Perhaps that is the reason she wants it done," I suggested.

"By George!" he exclaimed.

Well, that was the reason. I may as well admit it now. Tish is a fine and spirited woman, and as brave as a lion. But it was soon evident to all of us that she was going to keep Charlie Sands safe if she could. She was continually referring to his having been a sickly baby, and I am quite sure she convinced herself that he had been. She spoke, too, of a small cough he had as indicating weak lungs, and was almost indecently irritated when the chest specialist said that it was from smoking, and that if he had any more lung space the rest of his organs would have had to move out.

One way and another, she kept him from enlisting for quite a time, maintaining that to run a newspaper and keep people properly informed was as patriotic as carrying a gun.

I remember that on one occasion, when he had at last decided to join the navy and was going to Washington, Tish took a very bad attack of indigestion, and nothing quieted her until after train time but to have Charlie Sands beside her, feeding her peppermint and hot water.

Then, at last, the draft bill was passed, and she persuaded him to wait and take his chance.

We were at a Red Cross class, being taught how to take foreign bodies out of the ear, when the news came. Tish was not paying much attention, because she considered that if a soldier got a bullet or shrapnel in his ear, a syringe would not help him much. She had gone out of the room, therefore, and Aggie had just had a bean put in her auditory canal, and was sure it would swell before they got it again, when Tish returned. She said the bill had passed, and that the age limit was thirty-one.

Mrs. Ostermaier, who was using the syringe, let it slip and shot a stream of water into Aggie's right eye.

"Thirty-one!" she said. "Well, I suppose that includes your nephew, Miss Tish."

"Not at all," said Tish. "He will have his thirty-second birthday on the fifth of June, and he probably won't have to register at all. It's

likely to be July before they're ready."

"Oh, the fifth of June!" said Mrs. Ostermaier, and gave Aggie another squirt.

Now Tish and I have talked this over since, and it may only be a coincidence. But Mrs. Ostermaier's cousin is married to a Congressman from the west, and she sends the Ostermaiers all his speeches. Mr. Ostermaier sends on his sermon, too, in exchange, and every now and then Mrs. Ostermaier comes running in to Tish with something delivered in our national legislature which she claims was conceived in our pulpit.

Anyhow, when the draft day was set, _it was the fifth of June_!

Aggie and I went to Tish at once, and found her sitting very quietly with the blinds down, and Hannah snivelling in the kitchen.

"It's that woman," Tish said. "When I think of the things I've done for them, and the way I've headed lists and served church suppers and made potato salad and packed barrels, it makes me sick."

Aggie sat down beside her and put a hand on her knee.

"I know, Tish," she said. "Mr. Wiggins was set on going to the Spanish war. He said that he could not shoot, but that he would be valuable as an observer, from church towers and things, because he was used to being in the air. He would have gone, too, but----"

"If he goes," Tish said, "he will never come back. I know it. I've known it ever since I ran over that black cat the other day."

Well, we had to leave her, as Aggie was buying wool for the Army and Navy League. We went out, very low in our minds. What was our surprise, therefore, on returning late that afternoon, to find Tish cheerfully hoeing in the garden she had planted in the vacant lot next door, while Hannah followed her and gathered up in a basket the pieces of brick, broken bottles and buried bones that Tish unearthed.

"You poor dear!" Aggie said, going toward her. "I know just how you feel. I----"

"Get out!" Tish yelled, in a furious tone. "Look what you're doing! Great heavens, don't you see what you've done? That was a potato plant."

We tried to get out, although I could see nothing but a few weeds, but she yelled at us every moment and at last I gave it up.

"I'd rather stay here, Tish," I said, "if you don't mind. I can keep the dogs away, and along in the autumn, when it's safe to move, you can take

me home, or put me in a can, along with the other garden stuff."

Here Tish fired a brick at Hannah's basket, but struck her in the knee cap instead, and down she went on what Tish said was six egg plants. In the resulting conversation I escaped, and went up to Tish's sitting room.

Tish followed us soon after, and jerked the window shades to the top.

"There's nothing like getting close to nature," she said. "I feel like a different woman, after an hour or so of the soil."

She then took Hannah's basket and placed it on the window-sill overlooking the vacant lot, explaining that she used its contents to fling at dogs, cats and birds below.

"It makes a little extra work for Hannah," she commented. "But it's making a new woman of her. It would be good for you, too, Lizzie. There's nothing like bending over to reduce the abdomen."

But Aggie, having come to mourn, proceeded to do it.

"To think," she said, "that if they had only made it a day later, dear Charlie would have been exempt. It's too tragic, Tish."

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Tish in a cold tone. "He does not have to register. He was born at seven in the morning, June fifth."

"In the evening, Tish," said Aggie gently. "I was there, you know, and I remember----"

Tish gave her a terrible look.

"Of course you would know," she observed, icily. "But as I was in the room, and recall distinctly going out and telling old Amanda, the cook, about breakfast----"

"Supper," said Aggie firmly. "You were excited, naturally. But I was in the hall when you came out, and I was expecting my first gentleman caller, which no girl ever forgets, Tish. I remember that Amanda was hooking my dress, which was very tight, because we had waist lines in those days and I wanted----"

"Aggie," Tish thundered, "he was born early in the morning of June fifth. He will be thirty-two years of age early in the morning of Registration day. And if he tries to register I shall be on hand with the facts."

Well, whether she was right or not, she was convinced that she was, and

it is useless to argue with her under those circumstances. Luckily she heard a dog in the lot just then, and threw down a broken bottle and some bricks at him, and the woman in the apartment below raised a window and threatened to report her to the Humane Society. But, as usual, Tish was more than her equal.

"Come right up, then," she said. "Because I am a member of the Humane Society and have been for twenty years. I consider throwing bricks at that dog as patriotic a duty as killing a German, any day."

Here, by accident, the basket slid off the window-sill, and Tish closed the window violently.

"It hit her on the head," she said, in what I fear was an exultant tone. "I wouldn't have done it on purpose, but I guess it's no sin to be thankful."

Because the incident I am about to relate concerns not only Registration Day, but also Mr. Culver and the secret in the barn, I have been some time in getting to it. And if, in so doing, I have reflected at any time either on Tish's patriotism or her strict veracity, I am sorry. No one who knows Tish can doubt either.

In spite of Aggie, in spite of Charlie Sands, who protested violently that he distinctly remembered being born in the evening, because he had yelled all the ensuing night and no one had had a wink of sleep--in spite of all this, Tish remained firm in her conviction that 7 A. M. on Registration Day, when the precincts opened, would find him too old to register.

On the surface the days that followed passed uneventfully. Tish sewed and knitted, and once each day stood Aggie and myself on the outskirts of her garden and pointed out things which she said would be green corn, and tomatoes and peppers and so on. But there was a set look about her face, to those of us who knew and loved her. She had moments of abstraction, too, and during one of them weeded out an entire row of spring onions, according to Hannah.

On the third of June I went into the jeweller's to have my watch regulated, and found Tish at the counter. She muttered something about a main spring and went out, leaving me staring after her. I am no idiot, however, although not Tish's mental equal by any means, and I saw that she had been looking at gentlemen's gold watches.

I had a terrible thought that she intended trying to purchase Charlie Sands by a gift. But I might have known her high integrity. She would not stoop to a bribe. And, as a matter of fact, happening to stop at the Ostermaiers' that evening to show Mrs. Ostermaier how to purl, I found that dear Tish, remembering the anniversary of his first sermon to us, had presented Mr. Ostermaier with a handsome watch.

It was on the fourth of June that I had another visit from Charlie Sands. He is usually a most amiable young man, but on that occasion he came in glowering savagely, and on sitting down on Aggie's knitting, which was on steel needles, he flung it across the room, and had to spend quite a little time apologizing.

"The truth is," he said, "I'm so blooming upset that I'm not myself. Let me put these needles back, won't you? Or do they belong in some particular place?"

"They do," Aggie retorted grimly. "And for a young man who will be thirty-two tomorrow morning----"

"Evening," he corrected her, with a sort of groan. "I see she's got you too. Look here," he went on, "I'm in trouble, and I'm blessed if I see my way out. I want to register tomorrow. I may not be drawn, because I'm an unlucky devil and always was. But--I want to do my bit."

"Well," I observed, tartly. "I guess no one can prevent you. Go and do it, and say nothing."

"Not at all," he replied, getting up and striding up and down the room. "Not a bit of it. I grant you it looks simple. Wouldn't any one in his senses think that a young and able-bodied man could go and put his name down as being willing to serve his country? Why, she herself--she's crazy to go. I'd like to bet a hat she'll get there before long, too, and into the front trenches."

"Oh, no!" Aggie wailed suddenly.

"But not I," went on Charlie Sands fiercely. "Not I. How she ever got around that old fool Ostermaier I don't know. But she has. He's appointed her an assistant registrar in his precinct, which is mine. And she'll swear until she's black in the face that I'm over age."

"Can't you have the place opened before seven in the morning?" I suggested.

"I've been to him, but he says the law is seven o'clock. Besides," he added bitterly, "she knows me, and as like as not she'll sleep there, to be on hand to forestall me."

As I look back, I am convinced that a desire to do his bit, as he termed it, was only a part of his anger that evening. The rest was the feeling that Tish's superior acumen had foiled him. He had a truly masculine hatred of being thwarted by a woman, even by a beloved aunt.

"Well," he said at last, picking up his hat. "I'll be off." He went to the door, but turned back and glowered at us both, although I am sure we

had done nothing whatever. "But mark my words, and remind her of them the day after tomorrow. This thing's not over yet. She's pretty devilish clever"--(I regret to record this word, but he was greatly excited)--"but she hasn't all the brains in the family."

For a day that was to contain so much, however, the fifth of June started quietly enough. We telephoned Hannah, and she reported that Tish had left the house at five-thirty, although obliged to go only one block to the engine house which was her destination.

So far as I can learn, for Tish is very uncommunicative about the entire matter, the morning passed quietly enough. She had taken the precaution of having her folding card table and two pillows sent to the engine house, and when Aggie and I arrived at midday she was seated comfortably, with her hat hung on a lamp of the fire truck. When we arrived she was asking the sexton of the Methodist Church, whom she has known for thirty years, if he had lost a leg or an arm.

Aggie had brought a basket with some luncheon for her, and she placed it on the truck. But there was an alarm of fire soon after, and the thing went out in a rush with the lunch and also with Tish's hat.

Tish was furiously angry. Indeed, I have since thought that much of what followed was due to the loss of the luncheon, which the firemen declared they had not seen, although Aggie was positive she saw one of them eating one of the doughnuts that afternoon behind a newspaper.

But, worst of all, Tish's hat was missing. It reappeared later, however, but was brought in by the engine house dog, after having been run over by the Chief's machine, two engines and a ladder truck.

As I say, that was part of her irritation, but what really upset her was the number of married men. More than once, as she grew excited, I heard her say:

"Married? How many wives?"

When of course she meant how many children.

She had registered twenty-four married men and two single ones by one o'clock, and she was looking very discouraged. But at one o'clock the clerk from the shoe store at the corner came in, and said he had dependent on him a wife, four children, a mother-in-law, a sister-in-law and his sister-in-law's husband.

"Of course," Tish said bitterly, "you claim exemption."

"Me?" he said. "Me, Miss Carberry? My God, no."

Well, about two o'clock Charlie Sands came in. Tish saw him the moment

he entered the door, and stopped work to watch him. But he made no attempt to register. He said he was doing a column of slackers for the next morning's paper.

"There's aren't many," he said, "but of course there are some. The license court is the place to nail them."

"Do you mean to tell me," Tish demanded, "that there are traitors in this country who are getting married _today_?"

"There are," said Charlie Sands, sitting down on the fire truck. "Even so, beloved aunt. They are getting married so they can claim exemption because of a dependent wife. And I'll bet the orphan asylums are full of fellows trying to get ready-made families."

Tish is a composed and self-restrained woman, but she spoke so distinctly of how she felt about such conduct that Charlie Murray, our grocer's assistant, who has four children, did not so much as mention them when she made out his card.

"Of course," Charlie Sands observed, "I don't want to dictate to you, because you're doing all that can be expected of you now. But if some one would go to the license court and tell those fellows a bit of wholesome truth, it might be valuable."

"You do it, Lizzie," Tish said.

"I? I never made a speech in my life, Tish Carberry, and you know it."

"And I never before tried to get the truth from an idiot who says he is twenty-eight and has a daughter of eighteen! See here," Tish said to a man in front of her, waving her pen and throwing a circle of ink about. "I'll have you know that I represent the government today, and if you think you are being funny, you are not."

Well, it turned out that he had married a widow with a child, but had a cork leg anyhow, so it made no difference. But Tish's mind was not on her work. However, she was undecided until Charlie Sands said:

"By the way, I saw your friend Culver among the Cupid-chasers today. And this is his district. You'd better round him up."

"Culver!" Tish said. "Do you mean that--Lizzie, where's my hat?"

Well, we had to recover it again from the engine house dog, whom we found burying it in the back yard. Tish's mind, however, was far away, and she merely brushed it absently with her hand and stuck it on her head. Then she turned to Charlie Sands.

"I'm going to the license court," she said, between clenched teeth. "And

I am going to show that young fool that he is not going to hide behind any petticoats today."

"It's his privilege to get married if he wants to."

"When I finish with him," said Tish, grimly, "he won't want to."

All the way to the court house Tish's lips were moving, and I knew she was rehearsing what she meant to say. I think that even then her shrewd and active mind had some foreboding of what was to come, for she called back unexpectedly to Aggie:

"Look in the right-hand pocket and see if there is a box of tacks there."

"Tacks?" said Aggie. "Why, what in the world----"

"I had tacks to nail up flags this morning. Well?"

"They are here, Tish, but no hammer."

"I shan't need a hammer," Tish replied, cryptically.

I am afraid I had expected Tish to lead the way into the license court and break out into patriotic fury. But how little, after all, I knew her! Already in that wonderful brain of hers was seething the plot which was so to alter certain lives, and was to leave an officer of the law--but that comes later on.

Mr. Culver was at the desk. Just as we arrived, a clerk handed him a paper, and he walked across the room to an ice-water cooler and took a drink.

"The slacker!" said Tish, from clenched teeth. "The coward! The poltroon! The----"

At that moment Mr. Culver, with a paper cup in his hand, saw us and stared at us fixedly. The next moment he had whipped off his hat, and was coming toward us.

"Well!" he said, as he came up to us, "so it really did happen!"

Tish took a deep breath, to begin on him, but he went on blithely:

"You see, when I got back home that day, I felt it hadn't really been true. I had _not_ gone rabbit-shooting, and found three ladies half-buried in a haystack. And of course I had not driven an automobile along a creek bed and through the old swimming hole, with my own gun levelled at my back."

Tish took another breath and opened her mouth.

"Then, the other day," he went on, smiling cheerfully, "I thought I had had a return of the hallucination, because I fancied I saw you all on a wagon. But the next moment the wagon was driving on, and you were nowhere in sight."

"That was because," said Aggie, "when the wagon started we all sat down unexpectedly, and----"

"Aggie!" Tish said, in a savage tone. "Now, young man, I want to say something to you, and I'd thank you----"

"Oh, I say!" he broke in, looking suddenly depressed, "I can see you are still down on me. But don't scold me. Please don't. Because I am a sensitive person, and you will ruin what was going to be a perfect day. I know I was wrong. I apologize. I eat my words. And now I'll leave you, because if you should vanish into thin air again I should have to go and lock myself up."

Well, with all his gaiety he did not look particularly gay, and he was rather hollow in the cheeks. I came to the conclusion that he was going to marry another young woman, partly to keep out of going to war, but partly to spite the first. I must say I felt rather sorry for him, especially when I saw the way he looked at her. Oh, yes, I picked her out at once, because she never took her eyes off him.

I didn't think she was fooled much, either, because she looked as if she needed to go off into a corner and have a good cry. Well, she got her wish later, if that was what she wanted.

But Tish is a woman of one idea. While he chattered with one eye on the girl, Tish was eyeing him coldly. At last she caught him by the arm.

"I have something to say to you, young man," she commenced. "I want to ask you what you think of any one who----"

"I beg your pardon," he interrupted, and freed his arm. "Awfully sorry. I think a young lady over there wishes to speak to me."

He left us briskly enough, but he slowed up before he got across the room. He stopped once and half turned, too, with the unhappiest face I've ever seen on a human being. Aggie was feeling in her knitting bag for the glasses.

"Is she pretty?" she asked.

"Too pretty to be a second choice," I replied, shortly. "She's a nice little thing, and deserves something better than a warmed-over heart."

Tish had been angry enough before, but when I told her that he had been disappointed in love, and was merely making the girl a tool, her eyes were savage.

"She is pretty," Aggie observed. "Perhaps, after all, he does love her. Or if not he may learn to. And he cannot be very unhappy about marrying her. He said, you know, it was a perfect day."

"Go down and get into the car," Tish said, in a choking voice. "I'll fix his perfect day for him. Go down and start the engine."

I took a last glance as Aggie and I left the License Court, and if we had had any doubts they vanished then, because he was speaking to the girl with angry gestures, and she was certainly crying.

"Brute," Tish said, with her eyes on him. "A bully as well as a slacker. Never mind. She won't have to put up with him long. If I have any influence in this community that youth will be drafted and sent to a mud hole in France. Mark my words," she went on, settling her hat with a jerk, "that boy will be registered as a single man before this day's over. Go and start the engine, Lizzie. I daresay you remember that much."

Seeing that she had a plan, and "ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die," as Aggie frequently quotes, we went down to the street again. I was even then vaguely apprehensive, an apprehension not without reason, as it turned out. For, reaching over to start the engine, as Tish had taught me by turning a lever on the dashboard and moving up a throttle on the wheel, what was my horror to see the car moving slowly off, with Aggie in the rear seat and as white as chalk.

Tish, in her patriotic fervor, had stopped the thing in gear.

I ran beside it, but was unable to get onto the running board. I then saw Aggie, generally so timid, crawling over the back of the seat, and called to her to put on the brake. She did so, but not until the car had mounted the sidewalk and struck a policeman in the back.

This would not be worth recording, as there were no immediate results, had it not been for the policeman. It brought us to his attention, and came near to ruining Tish's plan. But of this later on.

I do not, even now, know just what arguments Tish used with Myrtle. Yes, that was her name. We had a great deal of time later on to learn her name, and all about her. The matter is a delicate one, and we have not since discussed the events of that day. But Aggie said later on, when we were sitting in the dark and wondering what to do next, that Tish had probably waited until Mr. Culver went out to look up a minister.

Whatever Tish said or did, the result was that only a short time after

Aggie had jammed on the brake, they came out together, and Tish was carrying a suitcase. Myrtle was hanging back, but Tish had her by the arm.

At first she did not see us. When she did, however, she worked her way through the crowd and opened the rear door.

"Get in," she said, in an uncompromising tone.

"But I really think," said Myrtle, "that I should----"

"Get in," Tish said again, firmly. "We can talk it over later."

"But are you sure he sent for me?" she demanded, looking ready to cry again. "I think it must be a mistake. He said to wait, and he would come back as soon as----"

It was the crowd that really settled the matter, for some one yelled that the girl had been eloping and that her mother had caught her in the License Court. Most of them were men, but they called to Myrtle not to let the old lady bully her. Also one young man said that if her young man didn't come back she could have him and welcome. It frightened Myrtle, and she got into the car and asked Tish to drive away quickly.

"I know it will be in the papers," she said forlornly. "And my people think I am at a house party."

But the next moment I caught her looking at Tish's hat, and her lip quivered.

"I guess I'm nervous," she said, in a choking voice. "I had no idea it was so much trouble to get married."

Tish heard her, although she had her hands full getting the car back to the street. She said nothing until we were in the street again, and moving away slowly.

"Then you might as well settle down and be quiet," she said. "Because you are not going to be married today."

Myrtle may have suspected something before that, perhaps when she first saw Tish's hat, for she looked dazed for a moment, and then stood up in the car and yelled that she was being kidnapped. Tish threw on the gas just then, and she had to sit down, but I looked back just in time to see Mr. Culver and the policeman standing in the center of the street, gesticulating madly.

"Little fool!" Tish muttered, and bent low over the wheel.

Well, they followed us. At the top of the first hill the girl was crying

hard, and there were eleven automobiles, Aggie counted, not far behind us. At the end of the next rise there were still ten. It was then that Tish, with her customary presence of mind, told us to scatter the tacks over the road behind us.

The result was that only four were to be seen when we got to the top of Graham's Hill, and they had lost time and were far away. Tish was in a terrible way. Her plan had been merely to take the girl away, because Culver belonged in her precinct and it was her business, as ordered by the government, to gather in all the slackers, matrimonial or otherwise. Then, after Culver had registered as a single man, he could, as Tish tersely observed later, either marry or go and drown himself. It was immaterial to her.

But now we were likely to be arrested for abduction, and the whole thing would get in the papers.

"Tish," Aggie begged, "do stop and put her out in the road. That Culver and the policeman are in the first car. I can see them plainly--and they can pick her up and take her back."

But Tish ignored her, and kept on. She merely asked, once, if we had any scissors with us, and on Aggie finding a pair in her knitting bag, said to get them out and have them ready.

I pause here for a moment to reflect on Tish's resourcefulness. How many times, in the years of our association, has her active brain come to our rescue in trying times? And, once the danger is over, how quickly she becomes again one of us, busy with her charities, her Sunday school class, and her knitting for the poor! Indomitable spirit and Christian soul, her only fault, if any, perhaps a slight lack of humor, that is Letitia Carberry.

"Watch for a barbed wire fence, Lizzie," she said, as we flew along. "And see how near they are."

Well, they were very close, but owing to Tish leaving the macadam at this point, they lost time at a crossroads. At the top of the next hill Aggie said she could not see anything of them. It was then that Myrtle tried to jump out, and would have succeeded had not Tish speeded up the car.

I could hear Aggie trying to soothe her, and telling her that Tish was not insane, but was merely saving her from a terrible fate.

"I have never been married, my dear, owing to an unfortunate circumstance," she said, in her gentle voice. "But to marry without love----"

The girl sat up, startled.

"But how do you know I don't love him?" she demanded.

"I am speaking of the young man," said Aggie. "My dear child, all over this great land of ours today, here and there are wretches who would use a confiding young woman in order----"

"Barbed wire!" said Tish exultantly, and stopped the car with a jerk. In an instant she was out in the road, cutting lengths of barbed wire from a fence with the scissors and placing them across the road behind us. Her expression was set and tense. When she had placed some six pieces of wire in position, she returned to the car.

"We can thank the war for that," she observed, coolly. "As long as the barbed wire fences hold out they'll never get us."

The first car was in sight by that time, and we could see that Mr. Culver and the policeman were in it. They shouted with joy when they saw us, but Tish merely smiled, and let in the clutch. Soon after we heard a series of small explosions, and Tish observed that the enemy attack was checked against our barbed wire, and that she reckoned we could hold the position indefinitely.

Aggie looked back and reported that they were both out of the car, and that the policeman was standing on one foot and hopping up and down.

It had been Tish's intention, as I learned later, merely to take the young woman for a country ride, and there to strive to instill into her the weakness and folly of being married by Mr. Culver as an exemption plea. But as we had been making forty-five miles an hour by the speedometer, there had been little opportunity.

However, as the last car was now standing on four rims in the barbed wire entanglement behind us, and as Tish's farm was not far ahead, she improved the occasion with a short but highly patriotic speech, flung over her shoulder.

"I don't believe it," said Myrtle, sullenly. "He loves me. We only ran away today instead of some other day later because my father is leading the parade in my town, and mother is presenting a flag at the schoolhouse."

"Very well," said Tish. "If he loves you, well and good. When your young man has registered, I'll see that you get married, if I have to kidnap a preacher to do it. But I'll tell you right now, I don't think you'll be getting anything worth having."

Well, Myrtle grew quieter then, and I heard Aggie saying Miss Tish never made a promise she could not fulfill. She then told about Mr. Wiggins, and had just reached the place where he had slipped on the eve of his

wedding and fallen off a roof, when the car stopped dead.

Tish pushed a few things on the dashboard, but it only hiccupped twice and then stopped breathing.

"No gasoline!" she exclaimed, in a rage. "We'll have to run for it."

The farmhouse was in sight now, about a half mile ahead. Aggie groaned, but got out and turned to Myrtle. But Myrtle was sitting back in the car with a gleam of triumph in her eyes.

"Certainly _not_," she said calmly.

"Very well," Tish replied. "I don't know but you are just as well where you are. That last car is done for, if I know anything about barbed wire, and they're not likely to chase a machine on foot. They're probably on their way back to town now, and I hope the policeman has to hop all the way. It's only forty miles or so."

She then started up the road, but turned:

"Bring her suitcase, Lizzie," she said. "There's no use leaving it there for tramps to come along and steal it."

She then stalked majestically up the road, and we followed. I am not a complaining woman, but if that girl had left any clothes at home they couldn't have amounted to much. Aggie refused to help with the suitcase, as she had her knitting bag, and as any exertion in summer brings on her hay fever.

It was perhaps five minutes later that I heard a faint call behind me, and turned to see Myrtle coming along behind. She was not crying now, and her mouth was shut tight.

"I suppose," she said angrily, "that it does not matter if tramps get _me_."

"Miss Tish invited you to the farm," I replied.

"Invited!" she snapped. "If this is what she calls an invitation, I'd hate to have her make it a request."

However, she seemed to be really a very nice girl, although misguided, for she took one end of the suitcase. But I learned then how difficult it is for the average mind to grasp the high moral purpose and lofty conception of a woman like Tish.

"I might as well tell you now," she said, "that I don't believe they'll pay any large sum. They're not going to be very keen about me at home, since this elopement business."

"Who'll pay what sum?"

"The ransom," she said, impatiently. "You don't suppose I fell for all that patriotic stuff, do you?"

I could only stare at her in dumb rage.

"At first, of course," she said, "I thought you were white slavers. But I've got it now. The other game is different. Oh, I may come from a small town, but I'm not unsophisticated. You people didn't send my father those black hand letters he's been getting lately, I suppose?"

"Tish!" I called sharply.

But Tish had stopped and was listening intently. Suddenly she said:

"Run!"

There was a sort of pounding noise somewhere behind, and Aggie screeched that it was the Knowleses' bull loose on the road. I thought it quite likely, and as we had once had a very unpleasant time with it, spending the entire night in the Knowleses' pig pen, with the animal putting his horns through the chinks every now and then, I dropped the suitcase and ran. Myrtle ran too, and we reached the farmhouse in safety.

It was then that we realized that the sound was the pursuing car, bumping along slowly on four flat tires. Tish shut and bolted the door, and as the windows were closed with wooden frames, nailed on, we were then in darkness. We could hear the runabout, however, thudding slowly up the drive, and the voices of Mr. Culver and the policeman as they tried the door and the window shutters.

Tish stood just inside the door, and Myrtle was just beside me. Aggie had collapsed on a hall chair. I have, I think, neglected to say that the farmhouse was furnished. Tish's mother used to go out there every summer, and she was a great woman for being comfortable.

At last Mr. Culver came to the front door and spoke through it.

"Hello, inside there!" he called, in a furious voice. As no one replied, he then banged at the door, and from the sound I fancy the policeman was hammering also, with his mace.

"Open, in the name of the law!" bellowed the policeman.

"Stop that racket," Tish replied sternly. "Or I shall fire."

Of course she had no weapon, but they did not know this. We could hear Mr. Culver telling the policeman to keep back, as he knew us, and we had

any other set of desperadoes he had ever heard of beaten for recklessness with a gun.

There was a moment's silence, during which I heard Aggie's knitting needles going furiously. She learned to knit by touch once when she had iritis and was obliged to finish a slumber robe in time for Tish's birthday. So the darkness did not trouble her, and I knew she was knitting to compose herself.

Tish then stood inside the door, and delivered through it one of the most inspiring patriotic speeches I have ever heard. She spoke of our long tolerance, while the world waited. Then of the decision, and the call to arms. She said that the sons of the Nation were rising that day in their might.

"But," she finished, "there are some among us who would shirk, would avoid the high and lofty duty. There are some who would profane the name of love, and hide behind it to save their own cowardly skins. To these ignoble ones there is but one course left open. Go. Put your name on the roster of your country as a free man, unmarried and without impediments of any sort. Then return and these doors will fly open before the magic of a blue card."

It was at that time, we learned later, that the policeman, who was but a rough and untutored type, decided that Tish was insane--how often, alas, is genius thus mistaken!--and started off for the Knowles farm to bring help. Mr. Culver made no reply to Tish's speech, and we learned later had gone away in the midst of it. Later on he was reported by Aggie, who looked out from an upper window, to be sitting under the chestnut tree where he had once rescued Tish's black alpaca skirt, sulking and watching.

Tish then went up and spoke to him from the window.

"See here," she said angrily, "do you think that I did not mean what I said through that door?"

He had the audacity to yawn.

"I didn't hear all of it," he said. "But judging from what I know of you, I daresay you meant it. Would you mind tossing me a tin cup or something to drink out of?"

"You are not going back to town to register, then?"

"It's early," he replied, coolly. "If you mean do I intend to walk back, I do not. I shall wait for the Sheriff and the posse."

It was then that Tish saw the policeman crossing a field toward the Knowles farm and she tried to reason with the young man. But he dropped

his pretence of indifference, and would not even listen to her.

"I've only one thing to say," he said, fiercely. "You be careful of that young lady. As to whether I register or not, that's my business and has nothing to do with the case. When you open that door and send her out, with four good tires to take the place of the ones you ruined, I'll talk to you, and not before."

He then got up and walked away, and Tish came downstairs and lighted a candle with hands that shook with rage. We had heard the entire conversation, and in the candlelight I could see that Aggie was as white as wax.

Well, the situation was really desperate, but Tish's face forbade questions. Aggie ventured to observe that perhaps it would be better to unlock the door and release the girl, but Tish only gave her a ferocious glance.

"I am doing my duty," she said, firmly. "I have done nothing for which the law can punish me. If a young lady comes willingly into my car for a ride, as you did"--she turned sharply to Myrtle--"and if a young fool chooses to sit in my front yard instead of registering to serve his country, it is not my fault. As a matter of fact, I can probably have him arrested for trespass."

As I have said, the farmhouse is still furnished with Tish's mother's things. She was a Biggs, and all the things the Biggses had not wanted for sixty years were in the house. So at least we had chairs to sit on, and if we had only had water, for we were all thirsty from excitement and dust, we could have been fairly comfortable, although Myrtle complained bitterly of thirst.

"And I want to wash," she said fretfully. "If I could wash I'd change my blouse and look like something."

"For whom?" Tish demanded. "For that slacker outside?"

Suddenly Myrtle laughed. She had been in tears for so long that it surprised us. We all stared at her, but she seemed to get worse and worse.

"She's hysterical, poor child," Aggie said, feeling for her smelling salts. "I don't know that I blame her, Tish. No one knows better than I do what it is to expect to be married, and then find the divine hand of Providence intervening."

But Myrtle suddenly walked over to Aggie and, stooping, kissed her on the top of her right ear.

"You dear thing!" she said. "I still don't get all the idea, but I don't

much care if I don't. I haven't had so much excitement since I ran away from boarding school."

She then straightened and looked at Tish. It was clear that her feeling for dear Tish was still vague, but was rather more of respect than of love.

"As for the--the young man outside," she said, "I seem to gather that he hasn't registered, and that I am not to marry him until he has. Very well. I hadn't thought about it before, but that speech of yours--suppose you tell him that I won't marry him until he has a--a magic blue card. I should like to see his face."

But Tish is a woman of delicacy, and she suggested that Myrtle do it herself, from an upper window. I went up with her, and we found Mr. Culver again under the tree. The conversation ran like this:

MYRTLE, (looking very pretty indeed but very firm): Look here, I--I've decided not to marry you.

MR. CULVER (rousing suddenly and staring up at her): I beg your pardon!

MYRTLE: I know now that I was making a terrible mistake. No matter how much I care for you, I cannot marry a slacker.

MR. C. (furiously angry and glaring at her): You know better than that!

MYRTLE: Not at all. Can you deny that you haven't registered yet?

MR. C.: What's that got to do with it? I daresay I'm losing my mind. It wouldn't be much wonder if I have. When I think of the way I've suffered lately--look at me!

MYRTLE (in a somewhat softened voice): Have you really suffered?

MR. C.: I? Good Lord, Myrtle--why, I haven't slept for weeks. I----

But here he stopped, with his eyes fixed on the roof overhead.

"Watch out!" he yelled. "Get back. Myrtle, she'll fall on you."

"Not at all," said Tish's calm voice from overhead. There was a rasping sound, and then a long wire fell past the window. "Now," she called triumphantly, "let your policeman telephone for the Sheriff and a posse! That was a party wire, and that farmhouse over there is on it. There isn't another telephone for ten miles."

Well, I looked around for Myrtle, and she was on the guest room bed, face down.

"Oh," she groaned, "I wouldn't have missed it for a trip to Europe. And his face! Miss Lizzie, did you see his face?" She then got up suddenly and put her arms around me. "I'm simply madly happy, Miss Lizzie," she said. "I have to kiss somebody, and since he--may I kiss you?"

Well, of course I allowed her to, but I was surprised. It was not natural, somehow.

Myrtle came down soon after and said that Mr. Culver was bringing some water from the well, and would he be allowed to come in with it? But Tish was firm on this point. She gave her consent, however, to his leaving the pail on the porch and then retiring to the chestnut tree. He did so, whistling to signify that he was at a safe distance, and I then carried it in.

"I say," he called to me when he saw me, "this situation is getting on my nerves. I carried off that policeman, for one thing. He was on duty."

"You needn't stay here."

"I daresay not," he replied rather bitterly. "But what I want to ask is this: Won't it be deucedly unpleasant for you three, when I report that you deliberately put my car out of commission so I could not get back by nine o'clock to register? Of course," he went on, "a box of tacks may have spilled itself on the road, but I never heard of a barbed wire fence trying to crawl across a road and getting run over, like a snake."

I reported this to Tish, and I saw that she was uneasy, although she merely remarked that he still had two legs, and that she had not asked him to follow us. All she had set out to do was to see that he didn't get married before he registered, and she was doing that to the best of her ability. The rest was his affair.

It was six o'clock by that time, and Tish had had nothing to eat since five in the morning, and none of us had had any luncheon. Although a woman who thinks little or nothing of food, I found her, shortly afterwards, in the pantry, looking into jars. There was nothing, however, except some salt, a little baking powder and a package of dried sage. But Aggie, going to an attic window to look for the policeman, discovered about a quart of flour in a barrel up there, and scraping it out, brought it down.

"I might bake some biscuits, Tish," she suggested. "I feel that I'll have to have some nourishment. I'm so weak that my knees shake."

"Myrtle," Tish said abruptly, with that quick decision so characteristic of her, "you might tell that worthless young man of yours to look in the granary. Sometimes the Knowleses' hens come over here, and I daresay they've eaten enough off the place to pay for the eggs."

But Myrtle, after a conference from the window, reported that Mr. Culver had said he would get the eggs, if there were any, on condition that he get his pro rata share of them.

"If there are ten eggs," she said, "he wants two. And if there is an odd number he claims the odd one."

This irritated Tish, but at last she grudgingly consented. In a short time, therefore, Mr. Culver knocked at the kitchen door.

"I am leaving," he said, "eleven eggs, eight of undoubted respectability, two questionable, and one that I should advise opening into a saucer first. Also some corn meal from the granary. And if you will set out a pail and come after me if I am wounded, I shall go after a cow that I see in yon sylvan vale."

His voice was strangely cheerful, but, indeed, the prospect of food had cheered us all, although I could see that Tish was growing more and more anxious, as time went on and no policeman appeared in the Knowleses' machine. However, we worked busily. Myrtle, building a fire and setting the table with the Biggses' dishes, and Aggie making biscuits, without shortening, while Tish stirred the corn meal mush.

"Many a soldier in the trenches," she said, "would be grateful for such a frugal meal. When one reflects that the total cost of mush and milk is but a trifle----"

Here, however, we were interrupted by Mr. Culver outside. He spoke in gasps and we heard the pail clatter to the porch floor.

"I regretfully report----" he said, through the keyhole. "No milk. Wrong sex. Sorry."

Ten of the eggs proving good, we placed two of them on a plate with three biscuits and a bowl of mush, and Tish carried it out, placing it on the floor of the porch, much as she would have set it out for the dog.

"Here," she called. "And when you have finished you might go after that accomplice of yours. He's probably asleep somewhere."

"Dear lady," said Mr. Culver, "I would, but I dare not. A fiery creature, breathing fury from its nostrils, is abroad and----"

But Tish came in and slammed the door.

It was after supper that we missed Tish. She was nowhere in the house, and the kitchen door, which had been bolted, was unlocked. Aggie wrung her hands, but Myrtle was quite calm.

"I shouldn't worry about her," she said. "She's about as well able to take care of herself as any woman I ever saw."

It was now quite dark, and our fears increased. But soon afterwards Tish came in. She went to the stove and pouring out a cup of hot water, drank it in silence. Then she said:

"I've been to the Knowleses'. The dratted idiots are all away, probably to the schoolhouse, registering. The car's gone, and the house is closed."

"And the policeman?" I asked.

"I didn't see him," said Tish. But she did not look at me. She fell to pacing up and down the kitchen, deep in thought.

"What time is it, Lizzie?" she asked.

"Almost eight."

Here Tish gave what in another woman would have been a groan.

"It's raining," she observed, and fell to pacing again. At last she told me to follow her outside, and I went, feeling that she had at last made a decision. Her attitude throughout her period of cogitation had been not unlike that of Napoleon before Waterloo. There were the same bent head and clasped hands, the same melancholy mixed with determination.

Mr. Culver was sitting under his tree, with his coat collar turned up around his neck. Tish stopped and surveyed him with gentle dignity.

"You may enter the house," she said. "The country will gain nothing by your having pneumonia, although personally I am indifferent. And, after thinking over your case, I have come to this decision." She paused, as for oratorical effect. "I shall deliver you to your registration precinct by nine o'clock," she said impressively, "and immediately after that, I shall see that you two are married. I am not young," she went on, "and perhaps I do not think enough of sentiment. But it shall never be said of me that I parted two loving hearts, one of which may, before the snow flies, be still and pulseless in a foreign grave."

She then, still with that new air of melancholy majesty, led me to the barn, leaving him staring.

It was there, by means of a key hanging round her neck, that Letitia Carberry, great hearted woman and patriot that she is, bared her inner heart to me. In the barn was a large and handsome ambulance, with large red crosses on side and top, which she had offered to the government if she might drive it herself. But the government which she was even then so heroically serving had refused her permission, and Tish had buried

her disappointment in the bucolic solitude of her farm.

Such, in brief, was Tish's tragic secret.

"I shall take it in to the city tonight, Lizzie," she said heavily. "And tomorrow I shall present it to the Red Cross. Some other hand than mine will steer it through shot and shell, and ultimately into Berlin. It has everything. There's a soup compartment and--well," she finished, "it is doing its work even tonight. Get in."

We found Aggie on the porch, having with her usual delicacy of feeling left the lovers alone inside. When she saw the Ambulance, however, she fell to sneezing violently, crying out between paroxysms that if Tish was going to the war, she was also. But Tish hushed her sternly.

There was a good engine in the Ambulance. Tish said she had ordered a fast one, because it was often necessary to run between shells, as it were. She then shoved on the gas as far as it would go, and we were off. After a time, finding it impossible to sit on the folding seats inside, we all sat on the floor, and I believe Mr. Culver held Myrtle's hand all of the way.

He said little, beyond observing once that he felt a trifle queer about leaving the policeman, who had been on duty when he picked him up at the Court House, and who was now lost some forty-five miles from home, in a strange land.

I am glad, in this public manner, to correct the report that on the evening of June fifth a German Zeppelin made a raid over our country, and that the wounded were hurried to the city in a Red Cross Ambulance, traveling at break-neck speed.

At nine o'clock Mr. Culver was registered at Engine House number eleven, fourteenth ward, third precinct.

At nine-fifteen Mr. Culver and Myrtle were married at the same address by Mr. Ostermaier, standing in front of the fire truck.

But this should be related in detail. So bitter was Charlie Sands, so uneasy about the license, and so on, that I feel in fairness to Tish that I should relate exactly what happened.

At ten o'clock that night everything was over, and we had gathered in Tish's apartment while Hannah broiled a steak, for Tish felt that the occasion permitted a certain extravagance, when Charlie Sands came in. Behind him was a dishevelled young man, with wild eyes and a suitcase. Charlie Sands stood and glared at us.

"Well!" he said. And then: "Where's the young lady?"

"What young lady?" asked Tish, coldly.

The young man stepped forward, with his fists clenched.

"Mine!" he bellowed. "Mine! Don't deny it. I recognize you. I saw you--the lot of you. I saw you drag her into a car and kidnap her. I saw that ass Culver and a policeman chasing you in another car. Oh, I know you, all right. Didn't I pay twenty-two dollars for a taxicab that got three punctures all at once thirty miles from the city? _Now where is she?_"

"Just a moment," said Tish's nephew, holding him back by an arm across his chest. "Just remember that whatever my aunt has done was done with the best intentions."

"D---- her intentions! I want Myrtle."

The dreadful truth must have come to Tish at that moment, as it did to the rest of us. I know that she turned pale. But she rose and pointed magnificently to the door.

"Leave my apartment," she said majestically. And to Charlie Sands: "Take that madman away and lock him up. Then, if you have anything to say to me, come back alone."

"Not a step," said the young man. "Where's my marriage license? Where's----"

But Charlie Sands pushed him out into the hallway and closed the door on him. Then, with folded arms he surveyed us.

"That's right!" he said. "Knot! I believe most pirates knit on off days. Now, Aunt Letitia, I want the whole story."

"Story?"

"About the license. He says the girl had the license."

"What license?"

"Don't evade!" he said sternly. "Where were you this afternoon?"

"If you want the truth," said Tish, "although it's none of your business, Charlie Sands, and you can unfold your arms, because the pose has no effect on me,--I was out rounding up a young man who had not registered. I got him and brought him in to my precinct at five minutes to nine."

"And that's the truth?"

"Go and ask Mr. Ostermaier," said Tish, in a bored tone.

"But this boy outside----"

"Look here," Tish said suddenly, "go and ask that noisy young idiot for his blue card. It's my belief he hasn't registered and more than likely he's been making all this fuss so he'll have an excuse if he's found out. How do we know," she went on, gaining force with each word, "that there _is_ a Myrtle?"

"By George!" said Charlie Sands, and disappeared.

It was then, for the first time in her valiant life, that I saw our Tish weaken.

"Lizzie!" she groaned, leaning back in her chair. "That Culver was married with another man's name on the license. What's more, I married him to that flibbertygibbet who had just jilted him. What have I done? Oh, what have I done?"

"They both seemed happy, Tish," I tried to soothe her. But she refused all consolation, and merely called Hannah and asked for some blackberry cordial. She drank fully half a tumbler full and she recovered her poise by the time Charlie Sands stuck his head through the door again.

"You're right, most shrewd of aunts," he said. "He's been playing me for a sucker all right. Not a blue card on him! And he belongs out of town, so it's too late."

"It's a jail matter," said Tish, knitting calmly, although we afterwards discovered that she had put a heel on the wristlet she was making. "You'd better get his name, and I'll notify the sheriff of his county in the morning."

Charlie Sands came over to her and stood looking down at her.

"Aunt Tish," he said. "I believe you. I believe you firmly. I shall not even ask about a young man named Culver, who went to get our marriage license list at the Court House this afternoon and has not been seen since. But I want to bring a small matter to your attention. That policeman had not registered."

He then turned and went toward the door.

"But I did, dear Aunt Letitia," he said and was gone.

* * * * *

Tish came to see me the next afternoon, bringing the paper, which contained a glowing account of her gift to the local Red Cross of a fine

ambulance. An editorial comment spoke of her public spirit, which for so many years had made her a conspicuous figure in all civic work.

"The city," it finished, "can do with many like our Miss 'Tish' Carberry."

But Tish showed no exultation. She sat in a rocking chair and rocked slowly.

"Read the next editorial, Lizzie," she said, in a low voice.

I have it before me now, cut out rather raggedly, for I confess I was far from calm when I did it.

* * * * *

"A SHAMEFUL INCIDENT.

"Perhaps nothing has so exposed this city to criticism as the conduct of Officer Flinn, as shown in a news item in our columns exclusively. Officer Flinn has been five years on the police force of this city. He has until now borne an excellent record. But he did not register yesterday, and on limping into the Central Station this morning told a story manifestly intended to indicate temporary insanity and thus still further disqualify him for the service of his country. His statement of seeing three elderly women kidnap a young girl from in front of the Court House, his further statement of following the kidnappers far into the country, with a young man he cannot now produce, is sufficiently outrageous.

"But, not satisfied with this, the inventive ex-officer went further and added a night in a pigpen, constantly threatened by a savage bull, and a journey of forty-five miles on foot when, early this morning, the animal retired for a belated sleep!

"Representatives of this paper, investigating this curious situation, found the farmhouse which Officer Flinn described as being the den of the kidnappers and which he stated he had left in a state of siege, the bandits and their victim within and the young man who had accompanied the officer, without. Needless to say, nothing bore out his story. A young married couple, named Culver, who are spending their honeymoon there, knew nothing of the circumstances, although stating that they believed that a neighboring family possessed a belligerent bull.

"It is a regrettable fact that the only scandal which marred a fine and patriotic outburst of national feeling yesterday should have involved the city organization. Is it not time that loyal citizens demand an investigation into----"

* * * * *

"Never mind the rest, Lizzie," Tish said wearily. "I suppose I'll have to get him something to do, but I don't know what, unless I employ him to follow me around and arrest me when I act like a dratted fool."

She sighed, and rocked slowly.

"Another thing, Lizzie," she said. "I don't know but what Aggie was right about Charlie Sands. I've been thinking it over, and I guess it was evening, for I remember seeing a new moon just before he came, and wishing he would be a girl. But I guess I was too late. If I'd known about this war, I'd have wished it sooner. I'm a broken woman, Lizzie," she finished.

She put on her hat wrong side before, but I had not the heart to tell her, and went away.

However, late that evening she called me up, and her voice was not the voice of a broken creature.

"I thought you might like to come over, Lizzie," she said. "That woman below has told the janitor she is going to pour ammonia water down on my tomato plants tonight, and I am making a few small preparations."



ENTERTAINING THE CANDIDATE

By Katharine Baker

from The Project Gutenberg EBook of **Atlantic Classics**, by Various

Bag in hand, brother stops in for fifteen minutes, from campaigning, to get some clean shirts. He says the candidate will be in town day after to-morrow. Do we want him to come here, or shall he go to a hotel?

We want him, of course. But we deprecate the brevity of this notice. Also the cook and chambermaid are new, and remarkably inexpert. Brother, however, declines to feel any concern. His confidence in our power to cope with emergencies is flattering if exasperating.

There is nothing in the markets at this time of year. Guests have a malignant facility in choosing such times. We scour the country for

forty miles in search of green vegetables. We confide in the fishmonger, who grieves sympathetically over the 'phone, because all crabs are now cold-storage, and he'd be deceiving us if he said otherwise.

Still we are determined to have luncheon prepared in the house. Last time the august judge dined with us we summoned a caterer from a hundred miles away, and though the caterer's food was good, it was late. We love promptness, and we are going to have it. Ladies knew all about efficiency long before Mr. Frederick Taylor. Only they couldn't teach it to servants, and he would find he couldn't either. But every mistress of a house knows how to make short cuts, and is expert at 'record production' in emergencies.

The casual brother says there will be one or two dozen people at luncheon. He will telephone us fifteen minutes before they arrive. Yes, really, that's the best he can do.

So we prepare for one or two dozen people, and they must sit down to luncheon because men hate a buffet meal. We struggle with the problem, how many chickens are required for twelve or twenty-four people? The answer, however, is really obvious. Enough for twenty-four will be enough for twelve.

Day after to-morrow arrives. The gardener comes in to lay hearth-fires and carry tables. We get out china and silver. We make salad and rolls, fruit-cup and cake. We guide the cook's faltering steps over the critical moments of soup and chicken. We do the oysters in our own particular way, which we fancy inimitable. We arrange bushels of flowers in bowls, vases, and baskets, and set them on mantels, tables, book-cases, everywhere that a flower can find a footing. The chauffeur comes in proudly with the flower-holder from the limousine, and we fill it in honor of the distinguished guest.

Then we go outside to see that the approach to the house is satisfactory. The bland old gardener points to the ivy-covered wall, and says with innocent joy, '---- it, ain't that ivory the prettiest thing you ever saw in your life?' And we can't deny that the lawn looks well, with ivy, and cosmos, and innumerable chrysanthemums.

The cook and chambermaid will have to help wait on the table. The chambermaid, who is what the butler contemptuously calls 'an educated nigger,' and so knows nothing useful, announces that she has no white uniform. All she has is a cold in her head. We give her a blouse and skirt, wondering why Providence doesn't eliminate the unfit.

We run upstairs to put on our costliest shoes and stockings, and our most perishable gown. The leisurely brother gets us on the wire to say that there will be twenty guests in ten minutes.

Descending, we reset the tables to seat twenty guests, light the

wood-fires, toss together twenty mint-juleps, and a few over for luck, repeat our clear instructions to the goggling chambermaid, desperately implore the butler to see that she keeps on the job, drop a last touch of flavoring in the soup, and are sitting by the fire with an air of childish gayety and carelessness when the train of motor-cars draws up to the door.

Here is the judge, courteous and authoritative. Here is his assiduous suite. The room fills with faces well known in every country that an illustrated newspaper can penetrate. From the Golden Gate and the Rio Grande, from New York and Alabama, these men have come together, intent on wresting to themselves the control of the Western Hemisphere. Now they are a sort of highly respectable guerillas. To-morrow, very likely, they will be awe-inspiring magnates.

Theoretically we are impressed. Actually they have mannerisms, and some of them wear spectacles. We reflect that the triumvirs very likely had mannerisms, too, and Antony himself might have been glad to own spectacles. We try to feel reverence for the high calling of these men. We hope they'll like our luncheon.

The butler brings in the juleps and we maintain a detached look, as though those juleps were just a happy thought of the butler himself, and we were as much surprised as anybody. The judge won't have one, but most everybody else will. The newspaper men look love and gratitude at the butler.

That earnest youth is the judge's secretary. The huge, iron-gray man expects to be a governor after November fifth, if dreams come true. The amiable old gentleman who never leaves the judge's side, has come two thousand miles out of pure political enthusiasm, to protect the candidate from assassins. He can do it, too, we conclude, when we look past his smiling mouth into his steely eyes.

Here is the campaign manager, business man and man-of-the-world.

This pretty little newspaper-woman from Utah implores us to get an utterance on suffrage from the judge. Just a word. It will save him thousands of votes. Well, she's a dear little thing, but we can't take advantage of our guest.

Luncheon is announced. Brother, slightly apologetic, murmurs that there are twenty-three. Entirely unforeseen. He babbles incoherently.

But it's all right. We women won't come to the table. Voting and eating and things like that are better left to the men anyway. Why should women want to do either, when they have fathers and brothers to do it for them? We can sit in the gallery and watch. It's very nice for us. And exclusive. Nothing promiscuous. Yes, go on. We'll wait.

Whoever is listening to our conversation professes heartbreak at our decision, and edges toward the rapidly filling dining-room.

We sit down to play lady of leisure, in various affected attitudes. We are not going near the kitchen again. The luncheon is simple. Everything is perfectly arranged. The servants can do it all. It's mere machine work.

From afar we observe the soup vanishing. Then one by one we stammer,--'The mayonnaise--'--'I wonder if the rolls are hot--'--'Cook's coffee is impossible,'--fade silently up the front stair, and scurry down the kitchen-way.

We cover the perishable gown with a huge white apron, we send up a fervent prayer for the costly shoes, and go where we are needed most.

We save the day for good coffee. With the precision of a juggler we rescue plates from the chambermaid, who is overcome by this introduction to the great world and dawdles contemplatively through the pantry door. Charmed with our proficiency, she stands by our side, and watches us clear a shelf of china in the twinkling of an eye. If she could find a stool, she would sit at our feet, making motion studies. But she couldn't find it if it were already there. She couldn't find anything. We order her back to the dining-room, where she takes up a strategic position by the window, from which she can idly survey the mob outside, and the hungry men within.

The last coffee-cup has passed through the doorway. Cigars and matches are circulating in the butler's capable hands. No more need for us.

We shed the enveloping aprons, disappear from the kitchen, and materialize again, elegantly useless, in the drawing-room. Nobody can say that luncheon wasn't hot and promptly served.

Chairs begin to clatter. They are rising from the table. A brass band outside bursts into being.

Brother had foretold that band to us, and we had expressed vivid doubts. He said it would cost eighty dollars. Now eighty dollars in itself is a respectable sum, a sum capable even of exerting some mild fascination, but eighty dollars viewed in relation to a band becomes merely ludicrous.

We said an eighty-dollar band was a thing innately impossible, like free-trade, or a dachshund. Brother attested that the next best grade of band would demand eight hundred. We justly caviled at eight hundred. We inquired, Why any band? Brother claimed that it would make a cheerful noise, and we yielded.

So at this moment the band begins to make a noise. We perceive at once

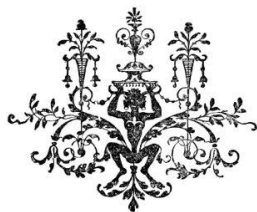
that the price was accurately gauged. It is unquestionably an eighty-dollar band. We begin to believe in dachshunds.

To these supposedly cheerful strains the gentlemen stream into the drawing-room. They beam repletely. They tell us what a fine luncheon it was. They are eloquent about it. All the conditions of their entertainment were ideal, they would have us believe. They imply that we are mighty lucky, in that our men can provide us with such a luxurious existence. They smile with majestic benignity at these fair, but frivolous pensioners on masculine bounty. American women are petted, helpless dolls, anyway. Foreigners have said so. They clasp our useless hands in fervent farewells. They proceed in state to the waiting cars. They hope we will follow them to the meeting. Oh, yes, we will come, though incapable of apprehending the high problems of government.

Led by the honest band, surrounded by flags, followed by cheers, they disappear in magnificent procession. Now we may straggle to the dining-room and eat cold though matchless oysters, tepid chicken, and in general whatever there is any left of.

The chambermaid has broken a lovely old Minton plate. We are glad we didn't use the coffee-cups that were made in France for Dolly Madison. She would have enjoyed wrecking those.

We hurry, because we don't want to miss the meeting altogether. We think enviously of the men. In our secret souls, we'd like to campaign. We love to talk better than anything else in the world, and we could make nice speeches, too. But we must do the oysters and the odd jobs, and keep the hearth-fires going, like responsible vestal virgins. It's woman's sphere. Man gave it to her because he didn't want it himself.



WALKING THE RAINBOW

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The Pleasant Ways of St. Medard, by Grace King

In spite of the careful attention of friends and the assiduities of talebearers, we live in a woeful state of ignorance as to the true condition of the sentiments of any one about us. And when we interrogate our own

judgment, we get no better enlightenment, for unfortunately we are all addicted to the pleasant habit of counting as friends, those whom we like; as enemies, those whom we dislike.

For that reason alone, and only that reason, Mr. Talbot's memory did not carry Monsieur Pinseau as a friend. The ridiculous attempts at speechmaking and the undignified campaign activities in favor of a political trickster, that rankled so painfully in the Creole gentleman's remembrances of the past, did not trouble the American at all; but the things that Monsieur Pinseau passed over with indulgence, those were the ones that Mr. Talbot's memory recorded with unalterable condemnation. In his own defeat and the triumph of the rival candidate, he attributed nothing whatever to Monsieur Pinseau whom he frankly did not credit with an idea in his head above fast living and extravagant spending of his wife's money — of, in short, playing the fool, as he called it and of making associates of men who were also given to that pastime. Which shows among other verities, how much more importance than they deserve we attach to our pitiful efforts to overthrow a good character and reputation. When Mr. Talbot heard his wife's report about Mademoiselle Mimi he was vastly pleased. "All the money in the world," he said enthusiastically, "could not procure better instruction or instruction that agreed better with his ideas." It was what he had hoped, when he had money with which to realize his hopes. "A lady," he explained, "must furnish example as well as precept to her pupils." His objection to most governesses and teachers was that they were such a warning against themselves; generally, an ugly, forlorn, disappointed, and soured set of women with far more of the furies than the graces about them. A teacher should represent to a little girl what she would like to be, for little girls learn by imitation mostly.

Mrs. Talbot never contested the opinions of her husband. Her way of entertaining him was to let him talk to her and to agree with him. As for the reasons of things, she seldom thought of them. The things themselves she was wont to say were as much as she could tackle.

"Give the little girls a good model," he continued, "and the battle is half won." He would never allow a daughter of his, to [emphasizing his meaning] be taught by a man, for she would end by trying to imitate him and the result would be a hobbledehoy. Made-

moiselle could teach all that it was essential for a lady to know ; that is, how how to take her place in society and maintain it.

He smoked his pipe for a few minutes in silence and his wife knew as well as if he had told her that he was thinking of those old salons on Royal, St. Louis, and Chartres streets where as a young man fresh from the University of Virginia he had met the charming society of the ladies whom he had never ceased to admire and whom he had chosen as the models for his daughters.

The only drawback he could see in Mademoiselle Mimi's school, was Monsieur Pinseau. And he charged his wife not to encourage any intimacy between the two families. He himself had never wished to know the man; had always avoided him and he would not suffer his children to be thrown familiarly into company that he disapproved of. If the world were to be made of such as Monsieur Pinseau was reputed to be, there would be no morality and no law in it. He knew personally nothing against him, except that he went with a set of men that flaunted their follies and so demoralized society. It was always easier to prevent than to break off. He thought that Mademoiselle Mimi had better be told this at the outset, firmly and frankly; then there could be no misunderstanding in the future. He confided to his wife this flaming sword and even instructed her as to how her delicate hands were to wield it.

" Do not let your politeness get the better of you. Be firm and decided. There is nothing that a mother should be so decided about as the surroundings of her daughters. Mademoiselle Mimi is a sensible woman and she will understand the importance of maintaining the standards of good society. A man cannot make his assertions in such matters as a woman can. A man represents at best only intellectual force, women, spiritual." After a pause he continued : " If women chose, they could rule the world through Society. We can better get along with a corrupt judiciary than a corrupt Society. Do not hurt her feelings but make your point clear. You can be clear enough when you want. And you had better warn the children a little, let them understand."

" Yes."

" I will depend upon you to manage it."

" Yes."

'* Do it in your time, and your own way. Ladies have a gift for such things. A smile, a word, no more; but what a rebuke! A volume couldn't tell more, a pistol shot be more killing."

He sank deep in his reflections, perhaps over some such pistol shot in his own memory.

When there was no alternative between doing his will and being disagreeable, his wife was forced to exercise some of the gifts which she also possessed in common with the charming ladies of his memory. For as much as he knew about them, she knew more. He saw the outside of their gifts, she, the inside machinery. " Tell a daughter," she said to herself, " that her father is an improper acquaintance for little girls who know nothing against him and never will know anything against him! Make Mademoiselle Mimi understand that there must be no intercourse between the two families, because in short, my husband is better than her father; Where? Great heavens! Where? In what salons ancient or modern did ladies say such things one to another ? Perhaps in the wilds of Virginia, where my husband was born, but not here in Louisiana, where, thank heaven! I was born. If it were the truth, which it is. Mademoiselle Mimi would surely know it better than any one else! How could she help knowing it? What did her whole life mean otherwise: her misfortunes, her laborp, her unselfish devotion? What did it all mean to her if not just that? But tell her so! Make her understand it, which means to make her acknowledge and confess it ! Mademoiselle Mimi would very soon put an end to any such conversation as that! And to save Society! Heavens above! Go around denouncing one another's fathers, brothers, husbands! That would be a feasible way of saving it, eh? What society would be left? And what woman would be sure enough of her own father, husband, brother — aye, sister and even mother ? " There had been this consideration in some families that she knew of ! " Go around denouncing this one and that ! No ! No ! Women maintain Society by just the opposite plan. Men denounce the criminal but hold on to the crime. Women denounce the crime but hold onto the criminal. That is the difference between them. And Mademoiselle Mimi was right ! A thousand times right ! as a woman."

Husbands, despite their convictions, and their superior assumptions to the contrary, have really no advantage

over other men in knowledge of a woman's mind, or, in short, of the inner determinations of a wife's mind. They can only know in truth, what the wife chooses to tell them, and a discreet wife often chooses to limit her communications of this kind. Wives for example, such as Mr. Talbot admired in the old salons, who were as unlike missionaries as one can possibly conceive. They were not women to brandish moral swords ! They were women on the contrary, like Mademoiselle Mimi.

So Mrs. Talbot was quite clear, in this at least, that Mademoiselle would be talked to as her husband directed at the Greek Calends and not before.

The bright glow of sunset shone in the sky. It brightened the spire of the little church and seemed almost to give a golden tone to the thin, weak voice of the Angelus bell. A few oranges still glittered amid the dark foliage of the hedge, the sour, bitter kind, — ^not the sweet ones whose flowers so poetically used to symbolize the hopes of brides. And the old garden, as an old face does sometimes from inward illumination, flushed under the golden and rose light of the sky, into a flicker of its pristine witchery and beauty. The children were scattered through it, fondling and caressing it, as if indeed it were an old face.

" I have never worked for anything in my life that I did not get it in the end." The husband spoke meditatively from another mile-stone in his thoughts. This was true, but his wife had never heard him say so before. There never had been any need to say it before. It was taken for granted. Now?

"But you worked hard for what you wanted," she responded quickly with her sure instinct of affection. " It was always said about you, that you were the hardest working young lawyer at the bar. I always remember a story Papa told about you. He was passing your office once in the middle of Winter, long past midnight and seeing a light in your office ; all the other windows were black, he went upstairs to see if anything were the matter, opened the door, and there you were over your books, dressed just as you had come from some dinner-party or ball."

" ' Well, Talbot,' he said disgustedly," her husband took up the story with a laugh, " ' you must love work.' 'Love,' I answered, 'I love it better than meat and bread.' "

His face showed his satisfaction at the memory of it. She possessed the art of recalling such things and repeating them appropriately. Her memory was a treasury to her. She never forgot a face, a name, a good deed, a pleasant speech or a humorous incident.

" Yes," her husband repeated, with gusto, " I always loved to work. I cared in fact for nothing in life that I did not work for. What a man makes up his mind to work for, he can obtain," he added confidently. And then he began to explain his plans again to her. Any one could understand them, they were so simple and natural. It was true he had lost a fortune; everything he had worked for and gained since he had been a lawyer — and he did not count in this what he should have inherited from his father who had died during the war and whose estate had been settled in Confederate money. He counted as his own only what he had made, and no man had made more or larger fees than he. He called over, as lawyers never tire of doing, his cases in the past and the briefs, the " historic briefs " he called them, that he had written. Having saved his library, he said, was the greatest piece of good fortune that could happen to him or any lawyer. If that had been lost, he would have considered himself unfortunate. The loss of his plantation would have been nothing in comparison to it. With its accumulation of private notes and records, it was perhaps the most complete in the city, he knew he would not have exchanged it for any he had ever seen. And he was lucky too in having his same old office. He could take up just where he had left off four years ago and as far as he could see, it was only a question of work with him, to catch up on the losses of the war. Fortunately, litigation could not be captured, confiscated or burned. " The fact is," he concluded, with a frank laugh, " if there is any important lawsuit, there are four or five of us whp are bound to be retained on one side or the other."

The only change he would make from former plans, was that instead of sending his sons to the University of Virginia, as he had intended, he would put them to work just as soon as they knew enough of the requisites — that is Latin, Greek, and mathematics, with sufficient science for respectability; which was far more than the greatest Americans had started with fifty years ago. If there was anything in the boys, they could get along on the education he was able to give them. If they could

not get along on that, it was a pretty good sign they would not get along on a better. The daughters would suffer less in education, for they could learn easier, all that ladies needed to know, and take more time over it. He had always counted on giving each one her dower when she became of age so that she could marry or not just as she chose. He had seen some unfortunate young girls marry for money, some literally for the means of living. A dower, he feared, would be beyond his reach now. The consequences of the war would fall heavier on the women than on the men. The lives of the men would be changed comparatively little. But the women ... it was slavery alone that had kept them from domestic drudgery ... he shook his head, and repeated, " domestic drudgery added to family duties." He smoked his pipe a moment and continued with a new variation of his subject, his wife listening without assent or dissent, looking through his telescope whichever way he wanted; either end the right one for her.

He ran over the list of his friends who like him had broken away from all that had constituted life to them to go into the war. As he gave the name, his wife's ready memory supplied her usual pleasant addenda of reminiscences ; how they used to like this one and that one, and how this one and that one used to like him and praise him to her, and all sorts of other items in connection with his friends that he had forgotten ; tossing over her little memories, and rummaging in them as she once would have done in her great bureau drawer of scraps! And like the ladies' scraps of that time her bits from memory were all of beautiful quality: silk, velvet, brocade, real embroidery, real lace; buttons and buckles that looked like jewelry, ribbons, ostrich and marabout feathers, all too pretty to throw away but so useless to keep except as souvenirs. The duel that he had prevented, the ugly family quarrel he had stopped, a reconciliation between a husband and wife bent on divorce, the last will and testament he had turned from resentment into forgiveness of injuries, and how he had always stood by the unfortunate. There was not a friend or client he could name that she could not connect with some personal obligation. It was only the good lawyer's usual showing at that time and the wife's usual version of his services; services that only lawyers and their wives enhance with any glamor of sentimental, obligation ; for a lawyer's clients have no such glamor in their view of the transaction.

But it was a pleasant review and a drawer of scraps

that any lawyer's wife would be glad to own. Even old Benton, millionaire and miser that he was, had owned to her that the beginning of his great fortune was laid when Talbot was a young law student, and he, Benton, a porter carrying bundles of goods on his back up and down four and five flights of stairs. And there was Tommy Cook, whom he had picked up out of the gutter > for he could never see a bright boy run to waste without stretching out his hand to prevent it . . . and . . . and . . . friends, friends, friends, wherever they looked in the past they saw friends and not an enemy. For according to the pleasant weakness already mentioned, they saw in the past none to whom they were not friendly ; forgetting, of course, contradictory experiences.

" I shall let Tommy Cook keep his desk in the office."
"What does he want with a desk there?" the wife asked innocently.

" Well, not to black shoes on, you may be sure. Tommy is a lawyer now."

How can he be a lawyer? "

By study and work like other men."

But I always thought that lawyers had to be gentlemen. I have never known a lawyer who was not a gentleman."

" You have been very lucky then," he answered dryly. There was silence between them for a moment, and then he took up the fallen thread of conversation again. " He has a pretty good practice already. He gained a suit for Benton the other day."

What! did Benton employ him?"

He needed a lawyer and Tommy is about as decent a one as he could find. He has been associated, at least, with the bar."

"Yes, as bootblack."

" Some of the others wouldn't have made even decent bootblacks; butlers, and camp followers, mostly."

She looked disgusted but said nothing.

" What," she asked, brightening with a sudden inspira-

tion, " what has become of the Riparian case ? "

Always before, that is before the war that had separated them from their past; in their talks about the future, they would discuss this case. She had completely forgotten it! What a prominent object it had always been in her husband's horizon! For years his ambition had rested on it. It was to be, in his eyes, the masterpiece of his profession, to give him, fame throughout the legal world. He used to say that if he never gained anything else but that one case he would have secured wealth for himself and his children, so far-reaching would be the effects of a favorable decision. The fee was contingent, but he was as sure of getting it, he used to say, as he was sure the heavens would not fall.

From the time that he had been called to the bar he had aimed at that case, he had studied and worked his way into it with such consummate patience, and legal keenness, that he was considered the only man in the city who had a perfect record of it in his mind. It was as much his own as any piece of property he could have bought. No matter when it was opened, now or twenty years hence, it could not be opened without his appearing in it as principal counsel.

" How strange ! thought the wife, " that everything else should give way in the South — government, states rights, social order — and that a great war should be fought and thousands of lives lost, and a mere question of the city's Riparian rights should survive! That like a lighthouse it should still be standing after the storm that has strewn the shore with wrecks ! *' This led her to ask about their friend Dalton who, having studied law in her husband's office, had been employed in some minor capacity in this very Riparian case.

" Dalton ? Oh, Dalton went into the war a private, and has come out a major."

" Well, is he any more human ? any less like a fish — cold and slippery ? "

As she had done about the Riparian case, her husband might well have wondered how such an idle and futile prejudice could survive the fierce tempest that had almost engulfed the National Government, and wrecked its apparently indestructible fortunes. He answered quietly :
" He is very much improved in appearance and seems full of energy. He will stay in my office and use my

library until he is able to set up an independent establishment."

A click of the gate's latchet caused them to raise their heads and look in that direction, and as they saw who was coming down the walk toward them, both exclaimed : " Harry Linton ! " Both stepped forward to meet him ; the aunt repeating with a glad smile, " Harry ! Harry ! I was thinking about him only today," She had not seen him since he waved his cap in good-bye to her from the car window when his company left for Virginia: the gay, young nephew, who had lived with them while he studied law with his uncle, whom she loved, it may be said, for his faults, for he had made no display of the family virtues. He was still boyish-looking, and had still the same old irresistible expression of friendliness and good humor on his round freckled face and in his blue eyes, and his light hair stood out as it used to in thick curls over his head. The only change was a long ugly scar that extended over one side of his face, from forehead to chin, cutting across an eye. He looked taller and showed the effect of drilling in his bearing but he was still shorter than his uncle by a full head.

They drew their chairs together, the children clustering on the steps in good hearing.

"Well," said his uncle, "what are you doing?"

" No, no," protested the aunt. " He must begin from the time he left us and tell us all his adventures. I want to hear the whole story from beginning to end."

The young fellow laughed and told hurriedly how, after he was wounded in Virginia he had been sent back to Louisiana to recuperate, and then had been transferred to the Louisiana command where, in a desperate fight on Red River, a small company tried to delay the advance of the Federal army, which they succeeded in doing; how he received his wound in the face, and was insensible when he was taken prisoner and brought to New Orleans. After he was discharged from the hospital he was kept in prison until peace was declared. The children crowded upon one another to get nearer to him while he talked along in his gay, bright, reckless way.

As soon as I could get out of the city," he continued, I started for home. I hadn't heard a word from my people for a year and didn't know anything about them

except that they had taken refuge in Texas — ^you know our place was just on the line of Banks's march."

His uncle nodded.

" And then, and then ? " his aunt's voice quivered with impatience.

" The chimneys are still standing and that is all that was left to show that there had been a human habitation there."

"Oh! Oh!" wailed the aunt, "that beautiful old house ! That fine plantation ! "

Harry was too much amused at the story to come to waste time on the lament. He threw his head back and laughed as at a joke.

" I wish you could have seen the family come back ! I was lucky enough to get there the day before. I camped during the night in the shelter of my ancestral ruins, that is in the furnace of the sugar house; there were not enough ruins of anything else to shelter a cat," laughing. " I knew they would come straight to the place as quick as they could travel, and I had a presentiment that that would be about as quick as I could get there from the city. Well, I was standing in front of my furnace, looking about for something to look at, when, here they came, just about dusk ! First a broken-down buggy tied with rope, drawn by a limping horse. Elizabeth was in it with Heatherstone. Behind them came a little cart with a kind of cover over it, drawn by an old gray mule. Mother drove that and it seemed filled with children, their heads stuck out in all directions like chickens in a basket."

All laughed with him at this picture.

" Heatherstone was shot all to pieces at Mansfield, you know. I had heard that he was wounded but I really did not know until I saw him that he had lost both an arm and a leg."

" An arm and a leg ! Oh, Harry ! " cried his aunt in horror.

" Yes, and on the hand he has left he has only three fingers. The thumb and forefinger had to be amputated."

"Oh!" . . .

" How does he stand it ? " asked the uncle, curtly interrupting the soft, sympathetic voice. ** He was the last man in the country to play the invalid with success."

" Invalid ! He an invalid ! whew ..." Harry threw back his head and whistled. " I was fool enough to think I might say something to him to show a little feeling, to express some sort of sympathy and that sort of thing about his being a cripple. By Jove," — the young man jumped up to act the scene for them — ** he turned upon me as if I were a Yankee. * Damn it. Sir ! Do you dare sympathize with me. Sir? Damn your sympathy! I don't want any man's damned sympathy! Take your damned sympathy where it is needed. Sir! We don't need it here. Sir.' "

He was a capital mimic and did the scene so well that one saw the tall gaunt figure of his Texan brother-in-law, as well as heard him snarling out his short sentences.

" * I will let you know. Sir ! I am as good a man now. Sir ! as I ever was ! I can do without my leg. Sir, and my arm. Sir! The Yankees are welcome to them. Sir? Damn them! My wife. Sir! doesn't need them either! My wife. Sir, at this moment is worth more than any hundred damn Yankees I ever came across. Sir! They didn't shoot off her leg. Sir, or her arm! And you needn't go offering her any of your damned sympathy either. Sir ! She doesn't need it ! " And I took his advice.

I didn't sympathize any more with any of them. You would never recognize Elizabeth. She goes stalking about in a pair of her husband's old cavalry boots and an old hat of his, and she ties her skirts up to her knees like the negro women used to do in the fields; and she wears a pistol stuck in her belt. In fact she does everything she can to make a man out of herself, except curse and smoke. And the more of a man she is, the better her husband likes it. The two are always together ; Mother takes care of the children."

" How is your mother? "

Harry sat down and laughed at this memory also.

" Mother is not changed a particle, not a shade. She goes stepping around in her old faded calico dress and sunbonnet, just exactly as she used to do at Princeton in that ugly old India shawl of hers and bird of Paradise

bonnet. She is just as unbending, just as firm, just as sure of herself, and she keeps Heatherstone, that's the eldest boy, under her thumb just as she used to do me; makes him study of nights and tells him what great things she expects of him, exactly as she used to do with me. Not one of them will own to being hurt by the results of the war. They pooh, pooh, their losses. In fact, they live as if the Yankees were watching and listening to them all the time, and they will die before they gratify them with a regret. I found out," seeing that his audience was waiting in silence for more on the subject, " that Mother and Sister had about fifty dollars in gold."

" Fifty dollars in gold ! " his aunt exclaimed in amazement as if it were a fortune.
Yes, fifty dollars in gold."

"How did they manage to save so much ? "

"They didn't save it," pausing to enhance his effect,
" they made it.

" Made it ! " ejaculated the aunt in still greater amazement. "How could they make money?"

" How could they make it ? " For the first time his voice was grave. " Why, they were in some God-forsaken place in Texas where the children were hungry for food and cold for clothes, and they had to make money or beg."

" But what could they do? "

"They knit, they spun, they cooked," lowering his voice and speaking slower, "they took in washing and ironing and they planted a little cotton, only a few rows, for the knitting, you know, and at the end of the war they had a little pile of it stuffed into their mattresses. Of course it was as good as gold. And when Heatherstone returned to them he came in a buggy with an old broken-down army horse that the commissary department allowed him, as it was the only way he could travel. The cart and the mule he managed to pick up somewhere ; I believe he gave one of his pistols for them."
How many children have they ? " asked his aunt.
Five, they lost two. Heatherstone, the, eldest, is a fine boy."

" You did not make up your mind to stay with them? "

asked his uncle.

"The fact is. Uncle, when I went there, it was to stay with them and work on the old plantation; and when I saw Heatherstone, I was determined to do so, for I never felt so sorry for people in my life," looking at his uncle and then at his aunt, " as when I saw them unloading themselves from their buggy and cart. I could have stayed willingly with them and worked like a negro for them the rest of my days. But they wouldn't hear of such a thing; grew indignant at the very idea of it. Heatherstone seemed to take it as a reflection on himself and Sister, and Mother waxed eloquent over my duty to become a great lawyer and chief justice of the state just as she used to do when we all had fortunes. They camped out .that night, as they had done nearly every night of their journey from Texas, but by noon the next day they were having a shelter put up around one of the old chimneys. Heatherstone and Elizabeth had gone out about daylight and rooted up some of the old negroes somewhere, and found the lumber. They said they could put up a very comfortable cabin for the fifty dollars and began at once to talk about a garden, chickens and ten acres of cotton. I suppose Heatherstone, the boy, will do the plowing when they get a plow, and I have not the slightest doubt but that Mother and Elizabeth will help in the hoeing and of course all, down to the youngest, will take a hand in the picking."

In spite of his natural high spirits and his fondness for laughing at his people, his voice grew sad. " As they didn't seem to have thought of me in any of their plans, and in fact, so far as I could see, didn't need me or want me, I concluded that the thing for me to do was to come back to the city and see if I could not make a little money here. They will need ready money and that badly, long before Spring, if I am not much mistaken."

" Well," said his uncle reflectively, " I do not know; but what you are right. You selected the bar for your profession, studied for it and were admitted. I do not see any good reason why you should throw away all the time, work, and expense you gave to it. Your four years of soldiering ought not to make you a worse lawyer, on the contrary, it ought to make you a better one." He smoked a few shifts from his pipe and concluded with : " And I have always thought, Harry, you ought to make a pretty good lawyer of yourself."

" I believe, myself," said the young fellow, rising,
" that I could at least make a living for my mother and
myself at it, if I had a fair chance. There is no telling,
however, what the outcome of all this is going to be,"
he added, with rather a questioning look at his uncle.

" Oh ! " was the answer, " I fancy, the country will
soon settle down and go to work to repair the losses.
That is what I am going to do," with a frank laugh.

" I had thought," the young fellow hesitated, glancing
furtively at his aunt as he used to do in critical ventures
with his uncle, " I had thought of trying something else
. . . to make money a little quicker. Times afe
changed. ..."

" But we are not."

" I don't know about that. Uncle."

'* But I do know."

" I might get a clerkship somewhere."

"A clerkship ! "

"Well, it would give me some money at once."

The mother hastily gathered her children together.

" It is their bedtime," she explained with a cheerful voice,
but trying to make her nephew see her warning shake
of the head.

" He is no wiser about getting along with his uncle
than he was before he went to the war," she said to her-
self as she left the gallery. But looking back from the
room, she saw the two men walking together down the
path to the gate, the elder one turning his head toward
the younger one; and she knew, as well as if she heard
the words, that some of the funds, brought by the
herald of prosperity, was to be despatched at once, to
the cabin built around the chimney on the ruined planta-
tion.



GUILTY

from the Project Gutenberg etext of **The Vertical City**, by Fannie Hurst

To the swift hiss of rain down soot-greasy window panes and through a medley of the smells of steam off wet overcoats and a pale stench of fish, a judge turned rather tired Friday-afternoon eyes upon the prisoner at the bar, a smallish man in a decent-enough salt-and-pepper suit and more salt than pepper in his hair and mustache.

"You have heard the charge against you," intoned the judge in the holy and righteous key of justice about to be administered. "Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"I--I plead guilty of not having told her facts that would have helped her to struggle against the--the thing--her inheritance."

"You must answer the Court directly. Do you--"

"You see, Your Honor--my little girl--so little--my promise. Yes, yes, I--I plead guilty of keeping her in ignorance of what she should have known, but you see, Your Honor, my little gi--"

"Order! Answer to the point. Do you," began the judge again, "plead guilty or not guilty?" his tongue chiming the repetition into the waiting silence like a clapper into a bell.

The prisoner at the bar thumbed his derby hat after the immemorial dry-fingered fashion of the hunted meek, his mouth like an open wound puckering to close.

"Guilty or not guilty, my man? Out with it."

Actually it was not more than a minute or two before the prisoner found reply, but it was long enough for his tortured eye to flash inward and backward with terrible focus....

* * * * *

On its long cross-town block, Mrs. Plush's boarding house repeated itself no less than thirty-odd times. Every front hall of them smelled like cold boiled potato, and the gilt chair in the parlor like banana. At dinner hour thirty-odd basement dining rooms reverberated, not uncheerfully, to the ironstone clatter of the canary-bird bathtub of

succotash, the three stewed prunes, or the redolent boiled potato, and on Saturday mornings, almost to the thirty-odd of them, wasp-waisted, oiled-haired young negro girls in white-cotton stockings and cut-down high shoes enormously and rather horribly run down of heel, tilted pints of water over steep stone stoops and scratched at the trickle with old broom runts.

If Mrs. Plush's house broke rank at all, it did so by praiseworthy omission. In that row of the fly-by-night and the van-by-day, the moving or the express wagon seldom backed up before No. 28, except immediately preceding a wedding or following a funeral. And never, in twenty-two years of respectable tenancy, had the furtive lodger oozed, under darkness, through the Plush front door by night, or a huddle of sidewalk trunks and trappings staged the drab domestic tragedy of the dispossessed.

The Kellers (second-story back) had eaten their satisfied way through fourteen years of the breakfasts of apple sauce or cereal; choice of ham and eggs any style or country sausage and buckwheat cakes.

Jeanette Peopping, born in the back parlor, was married out of the front.

On the night that marked the seventeenth anniversary of the Dangs into the third-floor alcove room there was frozen pudding with hot fudge sauce for dessert, and a red-paper bell ringing silently from the dining-room chandelier.

For the eight years of their placid connubiality Mr. and Mrs. Henry Jett had occupied the second-story front.

Stability, that was the word. Why, Mrs. Plush had dealt with her corner butcher for so long that on crowded Saturday mornings it was her custom to step without challenge into the icy zone of the huge refrigerator, herself pinching and tearing back the cold-storage-bitten wings of fowls, weighing them with a fidelity to the ounce, except for a few extra giblets (Mr. Keller loved them), hers, anyhow, most of the time, for the asking.

Even the nearest drug store, wary of that row of the transient hat-on-the-peg, off-the-peg, would deliver to No. 28 a mustard plaster or a deck of cards and charge without question.

To the Jett Fish Company, "Steamers, Hotels, and Restaurants Supplied--If It Swims We Have It," Mrs. Plush paid her bill quarterly only, then Mr. Jett deducting the sum delicately from his board.

So it may be seen that Mrs. Plush's boarding house offered scanty palate to the dauber in local color.

On each of the three floors was a bathroom, spotlessly clean, with a neat hand-lettered sign over each tin tub:

DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO UNTO YOU

PLEASE WASH OUT THE TUB AFTER YOU

Upon the outstanding occasion of the fly in the soup and Mr. Keller's subsequent deathly illness, the regrettable immersion had been directly traceable, not to the kitchen, but to the dining-room ceiling. It was November, a season of heavy dipterous mortality. Besides, Mrs. Peopping had seen it fall.

Nor entered here the dirge of the soggy towel; Mrs. Plush placed fluffy stacks of them outside each door each morning. Nor groggy coffee; Mrs. Plush was famous for hers. Drip coffee, boiled up to an angry sea and half an eggshell dropped in like a fairy barque, to settle it.

The Jetts, with whom we have really to do, drank two cups apiece at breakfast. Mrs. Jett, to the slight aid and abetment of one of her two rolls, stopped right there; Mr. Jett plunging on into choice-of--

The second roll Mrs. Jett usually carried away with her from the table. Along about ten o'clock she was apt to feel faint rather than hungry.

"Gone," she called it. "Feeling a little gone."

Not that there was a suggestion of frailty about Mrs. Jett. Anything but that. On the contrary, in all the eight years in the boarding house, she held the clean record of not a day in bed, and although her history previous to that time showed as many as fifteen hours a day on duty in the little fancy-goods store of her own proprietorship, those years showed her guilty of only two incapacitated days, and then because she ran an embroidery needle under her finger nail and suffered a slight infection.

Yet there was something about Emma Jett--eight years of married life had not dissipated it--that was not eupeptic; something of the sear and yellow leaf of perpetual spinsterhood. She was a wintry little body whose wide marriage band always hung loosely on her finger with an air of not belonging; wore an invariable knitted shawl iced with beads across her round shoulders, and frizzed her graying bangs, which, although fruit of her scalp, had a set-on look. Even the softness to her kind gray eyes was cozy rather than warm.

She could look out tabbily from above a lap of handiwork, but in her boudoir wrapper of gray flannelette scalloped in black she was scrawny, almost rangy, like a horse whose ribs show.

"I can no more imagine those two courting," Mrs. Keller, a proud twin

herself and proud mother of twins, remarked one afternoon to a euchre group. "They must have sat company by correspondence. Why, they won't even kiss when he comes home if there's anybody in the room!"

"They kiss, all right," volunteered Mrs. Dang of the bay-window alcove room, "and she waves him good-by every morning clear down the block."

"You can't tell about anybody nowadays," vouchsafed some one, tremendously.

But in the end the consensus of opinion, unanimous to the vote, was: Lovely woman, Mrs. Jett.

Nice couple; so unassuming. The goodness looks out of her face; and so reserved!

But it was this aura of reserve that kept Mrs. Jett, not without a bit of secret heartache about it, as remote from the little world about her as the yolk of an egg is remote from the white. Surrounded, yet no part of those surroundings. No osmosis took place.

Almost daily, in some one or another's room, over Honiton lace or the making of steel-bead chatelaine bags, then so much in vogue, those immediate, plushy-voiced gatherings of the members of the plain gold circle took place. Delicious hours of confidence, confab, and the exchanges of the connubially loquacious.

The supreme *_lèse majesté_* of the married woman who wears her state of wedlock like a crown of blessed thorns; bleeds ecstatically and swaps afternoon-long intimacies, made nasty by the plush in her voice, with her sisters of the matrimonial dynasty.

Mrs. Jett was also bidden, by her divine right, to those conclaves of the wives, and faithfully she attended, but on the rim, as it were. Bitterly silent she sat to the swap of:

"That's nothing. After Jeanette was born my hair began to fall out just as if I had had typhoid"; or, "Both of mine, I am proud to say, were bottle babies"; and once, as she listened, her heart might have been a persimmon, puckering: "The idea for a woman of forty-five to have her first! It's not fair to the child."

They could not, of course, articulate it, but the fact of the matter was not alone that Mrs. Jett was childless (so was Mrs. Dang, who somehow belonged), it was that they sensed, with all the antennae of their busy little intuitions, the ascetic odor of spinsterhood which clung to Mrs. Jett. She was a little "too nice." Would flush at some of the innuendoes of the *_contes intimes_*, tales of no luster and dulled by soot, but in spite of an inner shrinkage would loop up her mouth to smile, because not to do so was to linger even more remotely outside the privileged rim

of the wedding band.

Evenings, after these gatherings, Mrs. Jett was invariably even a bit gentler than her wont in her greetings to Mr. Jett.

Of course, they kissed upon his arrival home, comment to the contrary notwithstanding, in a taken-for-granted fashion, perhaps, but there was something sweet about their utter unexcitement; and had the afternoon session twisted her heart more than usual, Mrs. Jett was apt to place a second kiss lightly upon the black and ever so slightly white mustache, or lay her cheek momentarily to his, as if to atone by thus yearning over him for the one aching and silent void between them.

But in the main Henry Jett was a contented and happy man.

His wife, whom he had met at a church social and wooed in the front of the embroidery and fancy-goods store, fitted him like the proverbial glove--a suede one. In the eight years since, his fish business had almost doubled, and his expenses, if anything, decreased, because more and more it became pleasanter to join in the evening game of no-stakes euchre down in the front parlor or to remain quietly upstairs, a gas lamp on the table between them, Mr. Jett in a dressing gown of hand-embroidered Persian design and a newspaper which he read from first to last; Mrs. Jett at her tranquil process of fine needlework.

Their room abounded in specimens of it. Centerpieces of rose design. Mounds of cushions stamped in bulldog's head and pipe and appropriately etched in colored floss. A poker hand, upheld by realistic five fingers embroidered to the life, and the cuff button denoted by a blue-glass jewel. Across their bed, making it a dais of incongruous splendor, was flung a great counterpane of embroidered linen, in design as narrative as a battle-surging tapestry and every thread in it woven out of these long, quiet evenings by the lamp side.

He was exceedingly proud of her cunning with a needle, so fine that its stab through the cloth was too slight to be seen, and would lose no occasion to show off the many evidences of her delicate workmanship that were everywhere about the room.

"It's like being able to create a book or a piece of music, Em, to say all that on a piece of cloth with nothing but a needle."

"It's a good thing I am able to create something, Henry," placing her thimble hand on his shoulder and smiling down. She was slightly the taller.

It was remarkable how quick and how tender his intuitions could be. An innuendo from her, faint as the brush of a wing, and he would immediately cluck with his tongue and throw out quite a bravado of chest.

"You're all right, Em. You suit me."

"And you suit me, Henry," stroking his hand.

This he withdrew. It was apt to smell of fish and he thought that once or twice he had noticed her draw back from it, and, anyway, he was exceedingly delicate about the cling of the rottenly pungent fish odor of his workadays.

Not that he minded personally. He had long ago ceased to have any consciousness of the vapors that poured from the bins and the incoming catches into his little partitioned-off office. But occasionally he noticed that in street cars noses would begin to crinkle around him, and every once in a while, even in a crowded conveyance he would find himself the center of a little oasis of vacant seats which he had created around himself.

Immediately upon his arrival home, although his hands seldom touched the fish, he would wash them in a solution of warm water and carbolic acid, and most of the time he changed his suit before dinner, from a salt-and-pepper to a pepper-and-salt, the only sartorial variety in which he ever indulged.

His wife was invariably touched by this little nicety of his, and sometimes bravely forced his hand to her cheek to prove her lack of repugnance.

Boarding-house lore had it correctly. They were an exceedingly nice couple, the Jetts.

One day in autumn, with the sky the color and heaviness of a Lynnhaven oyster, Mrs. Jett sat quite unusually forward on her chair at one of the afternoon congresses of the wives, convened in Mrs. Peopping's back parlor, Jeanette Peopping, aged four, sweet and blond, whom the Jetts loved to borrow Sunday mornings, while she was still in her little nightdress, playing paper dolls in the background.

Her embroidery hoop, with a large shaded pink rose in the working, had, contrary to her custom, fallen from idle hands, and instead of following the dart of the infinitesimal needle, Mrs. Jett's eyes were burningly upon Mrs. Peopping, following, with almost lip-reading intensity, that worthy lady's somewhat voluptuous mouthings.

She was a large, light person with protuberant blue eyes that looked as if at some time they had been two-thirds choked from their sockets and a characteristic of opening every sentence with her mouth shaped to an explosive O, which she filled with as much breath as it would hold.

It had been a long tale of obstetrical fact and fancy, told plushily,

of course, against the dangerous little ears of Jeanette, and at its conclusion Mrs. Peopping's steel-bead bag, half finished, lay in a huddle at her feet, her pink and flabby face turned reminiscently toward the fire.

"--and for three days six doctors gave me up. Why, I didn't see Jeanette until the fourteenth day, when most women are up and out. The crisis, you know. My night nurse, an awful sweet girl--I send her a Christmas present to this day--said if I had been six years younger it wouldn't have gone so hard with me. I always say if the men knew what we women go through--Maybe if some of them had to endure the real pain themselves they would have something to do besides walk up and down the hall and turn pale at the smell of ether coming through the keyhole. Ah me! I've been a great sufferer in my day."

"Thu, thu, thu," and, "I could tell tales," and, "I've been through my share"--from various points of vantage around the speaker.

It was then that Mrs. Jett sat forward on the edge of the straight chair, and put her question.

There was a pause after it had fallen into the silence, as if an intruder had poked her head in through the door, and it brought only the most negligible answer from Mrs. Peopping.

"Forty-three."

Almost immediately Mrs. Dang caught at the pause for a case in point that had been trembling on her lips all during Mrs. Peopping's recital.

"A doctor once told a second cousin of my sister-in-law's--" and so on _ad infinitum, ad lib._, and _ad nauseum_.

That night Mrs. Jett did an unprecedented thing. She crept into the crevice of her husband's arm from behind as he stood in his waistcoat, washing his hands in the carbolic solution at the bowl and washstand. He turned, surprised, unconsciously placing himself between her and the reeky water.

"Henry," she said, rubbing up against the alpaca back to his vest like an ingratiating Maltese tabby, "Hen-ery."

"In a minute, Em," he said, rather puzzled and wishing she would wait.

Suddenly, swinging herself back from him by his waistcoat lapel, easily, because of his tenseness to keep her clear of the bowl of water, she directed her eyes straight into his.

"Hen-ery--Hen-ery," each pronouncement of his name surging higher in her throat.

"Why, Em?"

"Hen-ery, I haven't words sweet enough to tell you."

"Em, tell what?" And stopped. He could see suddenly that her eyes were full of new pins of light and his lightening intuition performed a miracle of understanding.

"Emmy!" he cried, jerking her so that her breath jumped, and at the sudden drench of tears down her face sat her down, supporting her roundish back with his wet hands, although he himself felt weak.

"I--can't say--what I feel, Henry--only--God is good and--I'm not afraid."

He held her to his shoulder and let her tears rain down into his watch pocket, so shaken that he found himself mouthing silent words.

"God is good, Henry, isn't He?"

"Yes, Emmy, yes. Oh, my Emmy!"

"It must have been our prayers, Henry."

"Well," sheepishly, "not exactly mine, Emmy; you're the saint of this family. But I--I've wished."

"Henry. I'm so happy--Mrs. Peopping had Jeanette at forty-three. Three years older than me. I'm not afraid."

It was then he looked down at her graying head there, prone against his chest, and a dart of fear smote him.

"Emmy," he cried, dragging her tear-happy face up to his, "if you're afraid--not for anything in the world! You're first, Em."

She looked at him with her eyes two lamps.

"Afraid? That's the beautiful part, Henry. I'm not. Only happy. Why afraid, Henry--if others dare it at--forty-three--You mean because it was her second?"

He faced her with a scorch of embarrassment in his face.

"You--We--Well, we're not spring chickens any more, Em. If you are sure it's not too--"

She hugged him, laughing her tears.

"I'm all right, Henry--we've been too happy not to--to--perpetuate--it."

This time he did not answer. His cheek was against the crochet of her yoke and she could hear his sobs with her heart.

* * * * *

Miraculously, like an amoeba reaching out to inclose unto itself, the circle opened with a gasp of astonishment that filled Mrs. Peopping's O to its final stretch and took unto its innermost Emma Jett.

Nor did she wear her initiation lightly. There was a new tint out in her long cheeks, and now her chair, a rocker, was but one removed from Mrs. Peopping's.

Oh, the long, sweet afternoons over garments that made needlework sublime. No longer the padded rose on the centerpiece or the futile doily, but absurd little dresses with sleeves that she measured to the length of her hand, and yokes cut out to the pattern of a playing card, and all fretted over with feather-stitching that was frailer than maidenhair fern and must have cost many an eye-ache, which, because of its source, was easy to bear.

And there happened to Mrs. Jett that queer juvenescence that sometimes comes to men and women in middle life. She who had enjoyed no particular youth (her father had died in a ferryboat crash two weeks before her birth, and her mother three years after) came suddenly to acquire comeliness which her youth had never boasted.

The round-shouldered, long-cheeked girl had matured gingerly to rather sparse womanhood that now at forty relented back to a fulsome thirty.

Perhaps it was the tint of light out in her face, perhaps the splendor of the vision; but at any rate, in those precious months to come, Mrs. Jett came to look herself as she should have looked ten years back.

They were timid and really very beautiful together, she and Henry Jett. He came to regard her as a vase of porcelain, and, in his ignorance, regarded the doctor's mandates harsh; would not permit her to walk, but ordered a hansom cab every day from three to four, Mrs. Jett alternating punctiliously with each of the boarding-house ladies for driving companion.

Every noon, for her delectation at luncheon, he sent a boy from the store with a carton of her special favorites--Blue Point oysters. She suddenly liked them small because, as she put it, they went down easier, and he thought that charming. Lynnhavens for mortals of tougher growth.

Long evenings they spent at names, exercising their pre-determination as to sex. "Ann" was her choice, and he was all for canceling his

preference for "Elizabeth," until one morning she awakened to the white light of inspiration.

"I have it! Why not Ann Elizabeth?"

"Great!" And whistled so through his shaving that his mouth was rayed with a dark sunburst of beard where the razor had not found surface.

They talked of housekeeping, reluctantly, it is true, because Mrs. Plush herself was fitting up, of hard-to-spare evenings, a basinette of pink and white. They even talked of schools.

Then came the inevitable time when Mrs. Jett lost interest. Quite out of a clear sky even the Blue Points were taboo, and instead of joining this or that card or sewing circle, there were long afternoons of stitching away alone, sometimes the smile out on her face, sometimes not.

"Em, is it all right with you?" Henry asked her once or twice, anxiously.

"Of course it is! If I weren't this way--now--it wouldn't be natural. You don't understand."

He didn't, so could only be vaguely and futilely sorry.

Then one day something quite horrible, in a small way, happened to Mrs. Jett. Sitting sewing, suddenly it seemed to her that through the very fluid of her eyeballs, as it were, floated a school of fish. Small ones--young smelts, perhaps--with oval lips, fillips to their tails, and sides that glistened.

She laid down her bit of linen lawn, fingers to her lids as if to squeeze out their tiredness. She was trembling from the unpleasantness, and for a frightened moment could not swallow. Then she rose, shook out her skirts, and to be rid of the moment carried her sewing up to Mrs. Dang's, where a euchre game was in session, and by a few adroit questions in between deals gained the reassurance that a nervous state in her "condition" was highly normal.

She felt easier, but there was the same horrid recurrence three times that week. Once during an evening of lotto down in the front parlor she pushed back from the table suddenly, hand flashing up to her throat.

"Em!" said Mr. Jett, who was calling the numbers.

"It's nothing," she faltered, and then, regaining herself more fully, "nothing," she repeated, the roundness out in her voice this time.

The women exchanged knowing glances.

"She's all right," said Mrs. Peopping, omnipotently. "Those things pass."

Going upstairs that evening, alone in the hallway, they flung an arm each across the other's shoulder, crowding playfully up the narrow flight.

"Emmy," he said, "poor Em, everything will be all right."

She restrained an impulse to cry. "Poor nothing," she said.

But neither the next evening, which was Friday, nor for Fridays thereafter, would she venture down for fish dinner, dining cozily up in her room off milk toast and a fluffy meringue dessert prepared especially by Mrs. Plush. It was floating-island night downstairs.

Henry puzzled a bit over the Fridays. It was his heaviest day at the business, and it was upsetting to come home tired and feel her place beside him at the basement dinner table vacant.

But the women's nods were more knowing than ever, the reassuring insinuations more and more delicate.

But one night, out of one of those stilly cisterns of darkness that between two and four are deepest with sleep, Henry was awakened on the crest of such a blow and yell that he swam up to consciousness in a ready-made armor of high-napped gooseflesh.

A regrettable thing had happened. Awakened, too, on the high tide of what must have been a disturbing dream, Mrs. Jett flung out her arm as if to ward off something. That arm encountered Henry, snoring lightly in his sleep at her side. But, unfortunately, to that frightened fling of her arm Henry did not translate himself to her as Henry.

That was a fish lying there beside her! A man-sized fish with its mouth jerked open to the shape of a gasp and the fillip still through its enormous body, as if its flanks were uncomfortably dry. A fish!

With a shriek that tore a jagged rent through the darkness Mrs. Jett began pounding at the slippery flanks, her hands sliding off its shininess.

"Out! Out! Henry, where are you? Help me! O God, don't let him get me. Take him away, Henry! Where are you? My hands--slippery! Where are you--"

Stunned, feeling for her in the darkness, he wanted to take her shuddering form into his arms and waken her out of this horror, but with each groping move of his her hurtling shrieks came faster, and finally, dragging the bedclothing with her, she was down on the floor at the

bedside, blobbering. That is the only word for it--blobbering.

He found a light, and by this time there were already other lights flashing up in the startled household. When he saw her there in the ague of a huddle on the floor beside the bed, a cold sweat broke out over him so that he could almost feel each little explosion from the pores.

"Why, Emmy--Emmy--my Emmy--my Emmy--"

She saw him now and knew him, and tried in her poor and already burningly ashamed way to force her chattering jaws together.

"Hen-ery--dream--bad--fish--Hen-ery--"

He drew her up to the side of the bed, covering her shivering knees as she sat there, and throwing a blanket across her shoulders. Fortunately he was aware that the soothing note in his voice helped, and so he sat down beside her, stroking her hand, stroking, almost as if to hypnotize her into quiet.

"Henry," she said, closing her fingers into his wrists, "I must have dreamed--a horrible dream. Get back to bed, dear. I--I don't know what ails me, waking up like that. That--fish! O God! Henry, hold me, hold me."

He did, lulling her with a thousand repetitions of his limited store of endearments, and he could feel the jerk of sobs in her breathing subside and she seemed almost to doze, sitting there with her far hand across her body and up against his cheek.

Then came knocks at the door, and hurried explanations through the slit that he opened, and Mrs. Peopping's eye close to the crack.

"Everything is all right.... Just a little bad dream the missus had.... All right now.... To be expected, of course.... No, nothing anyone can do.... Good night. Sorry.... No, thank you. Everything is all right."

The remainder of the night the Jetts kept a small light burning, after a while Henry dropping off into exhausted and heavy sleep. For hours Mrs. Jett lay staring at the small bud of light, no larger than a human eye. It seemed to stare back at her, warning, Now don't you go dropping off to sleep and misbehave again.

And holding herself tense against a growing drowsiness, she didn't--for fear--

* * * * *

The morning broke clear, and for Mrs. Jett full of small reassurances. It was good to hear the clatter of milk deliveries, and the first bar

of sunshine came in through the hand-embroidered window curtains like a smile, and she could smile back. Later she ventured down shamefacedly for the two cups of coffee, which she drank bravely, facing the inevitable potpourri of comment from this one and that one.

"That was a fine scare you gave us last night, Mrs. Jett."

"I woke up stiff with fright. Didn't I, Will? Gracious! That first yell was a curdler!"

"Just before Jeanette was born I used to have bad dreams, too, but nothing like that. My!"

"My mother had a friend whose sister-in-law walked in her sleep right out of a third-story window and was dashed to--"

"Shh-h-h!"

"It's natural, Mrs. Jett. Don't you worry."

She really tried not to, and after some subsequent and private reassurance from Mrs. Peopping and Mrs. Keller, went for her hansom ride with a pleasant anticipation of the Park in red leaf, Mrs. Plush, in a brocade cape with ball fringe, sitting erect beside her.

One day, in the presence of Mrs. Peopping, Mrs. Jett jumped to her feet with a violent shaking of her right hand, as if to dash off something that had crawled across its back.

"Ugh!" she cried. "It flopped right on my hand. A minnow! Ugh!"

"A what?" cried Mrs. Peopping, jumping to her feet and her flesh seeming to crawl up.

"A minnow. I mean a bug--a June bug. It was a bug, Mrs. Peopping."

There ensued a mock search for the thing, the two women, on all-fours, peering beneath the chairs. In that position they met levelly, eye to eye. Then without more ado rose, brushing their knees and reseating themselves.

"Maybe if you would read books you would feel better," said Mrs. Peopping, scooping up a needleful of steel beads. "I know a woman who made it her business to read all the poetry books she could lay hands on, and went to all the bandstand concerts in the Park the whole time, and now her daughter sings in the choir out in Saginaw, Michigan."

"I know some believe in that," said Mrs. Jett, trying to force a smile through her pallor. "I must try it."

But the infinitesimal stitching kept her so busy.

* * * * *

It was inevitable, though, that in time Henry should begin to shoulder more than a normal share of unease.

One evening she leaned across the little lamplit table between them as he sat reading in the Persian-design dressing gown and said, as rapidly as her lips could form the dreadful repetition, "The fish, the fish, the fish, the fish." And then, almost impudently for her, disclaimed having said it.

He urged her to visit her doctor and she would not, and so, secretly, he did, and came away better satisfied, and with directions for keeping her diverted, which punctiliously he tried to observe.

He began by committing sly acts of discretion on his own accord. Was careful not to handle the fish. Changed his suit now before coming home, behind a screen in his office, and, feeling foolish, went out and purchased a bottle of violet eau de Cologne, which he rubbed into his palms and for some inexplicable reason on his half-bald spot.

Of course that was futile, because the indescribably and faintly rotten smell of the sea came through, none the less, and to Henry he was himself heinous with scent.

One Sunday morning, as was his wont, Mr. Jett climbed into his dressing gown and padded downstairs for the loan of little Jeanette Peopping, with whom he returned, the delicious nub of her goldilocks head showing just above the blanket which enveloped her, eyes and all.

He deposited her in bed beside Mrs. Jett, the little pink feet peeping out from her nightdress and her baby teeth showing in a smile that Mr. Jett loved to pinch together with thumb and forefinger.

"Cover her up quick, Em, it's chilly this morning."

Quite without precedent, Jeanette puckered up to cry, holding herself rigidly to Mr. Jett's dressing gown.

"Why, Jeanette baby, don't you want to go to Aunty Em?"

"No! No! No!" Trying to ingratiate herself back into Mr. Jett's arms.

"Baby, you'll take cold. Come under covers with Aunty Em?"

"No! No! No! Take me back."

"Oh, Jeanette, that isn't nice! What ails the child? She's always so

eager to come to me. Shame on Jeanette! Come, baby, to Auntie Em?"

"No! No! No! My mamma says you're crazy. Take me back--take me."

For a frozen moment Henry regarded his wife above the glittering fluff of little-girl curls. It seemed to him he could almost see her face become smaller, like a bit of ice under sun.

"Naughty little Jeanette," he said, shouldering her and carrying her down the stairs; "naughty little girl."

When he returned his wife was sitting locked in the attitude in which he had left her.

"Henry!" she whispered, reaching out and closing her hand over his so that the nails bit in. "Not that, Henry! Tell me not that!"

"Why, Em," he said, sitting down and trembling, "I'm surprised at you, listening to baby talk! Why, Em, I'm surprised at you!"

She leaned over, shaking him by the shoulder.

"I know. They're saying it about me. I'm not that, Henry. I swear I'm not that! Always protect me against their saying that, Henry. Not crazy--not that! It's natural for me to feel queer at times--now. Every woman in this house who says--that--about me has had her nervous feelings. It's not quite so easy for me, as if I were a bit younger. That's all. The doctor said that. But nothing to worry about. Mrs. Peopping had Jeanette--Oh, Henry promise me you'll always protect me against their saying that! I'm not that--I swear to you, Henry--not that!"

"I know you're not, Emmy. It's too horrible and too ridiculous to talk about. Pshaw--pshaw!"

"You do know I'm not, don't you? Tell me again you do know."

"I do. Do."

"And you'll always protect me against anyone saying it? They'll believe you, Henry, not me. Promise me to protect me against them, Henry. Promise to protect me against our little Ann Elizabeth ever thinking that of--of her mother."

"Why, Emmy!" he said. "Why, Emmy! I just promise a thousand times--" and could not go on, working his mouth rather foolishly as if he had not teeth and were rubbing empty gums together.

But through her hot gaze of tears she saw and understood and, satisfied, rubbed her cheek against his arm.

The rest is cataclysmic.

Returning home one evening in a nice glow from a January out-of-doors, his mustache glistening with little frozen drops and his hands (he never wore gloves) unbending of cold, Mrs. Jett rose at her husband's entrance from her low chair beside the lamp.

"Well, well!" he said, exhaling heartily, the scent of violet denying the pungency of fish and the pungency of fish denying the scent of violet. "How's the busy bee this evening?"

For answer Mrs. Jett met him with the crescendo yell of a gale sweeping around a chimney.

"Ya-a-ah! Keep out--you! Fish! Fish!" she cried, springing toward him; and in the struggle that ensued the tubing wrenched off the gas lamp and plunged them into darkness. "Fish! I'll fix you! Ya-a-ah!"

"Emmy! For God's sake, it's Henry! Em!"

"Ya-a-ah! I'll fix you! Fish! Fish!"

* * * * *

Two days later Ann Elizabeth was born, beautiful, but premature by two weeks.

Emma Jett died holding her tight against her newly rich breasts, for a few of the most precious and most fleeting moments of her life.

All her absurd fears washed away, her free hand could lie without spasm in Henry's, and it was as if she found in her last words a secret euphony that delighted her.

"Ann-Elizabeth. Sweet-beautiful. Ann-Elizabeth. Sweet-beautiful."

Later in his bewildered and almost ludicrous widowerhood tears would sometimes galumph down on his daughter's face as Henry rocked her of evenings and Sunday mornings.

"Sweet-beautiful," came so absurdly from under his swiftly graying mustache, but often, when sure he was quite alone, he would say it over and over again.

"Sweet-beautiful. Ann-Elizabeth. Sweet-beautiful. Ann-Elizabeth."

* * * * *

Of course the years puttied in and healed and softened, until for Henry

almost a Turner haze hung between him and some of the stark facts of Emma Jett's death, turping out horror, which is always the first to fade from memory, and leaving a dear sepia outline of the woman who had been his.

At seventeen, Ann Elizabeth was the sun, the sky, the west wind, and the shimmer of spring--all gone into the making of her a rosebud off the stock of his being.

His way of putting it was, "You're my all, Annie, closer to me than I am to myself."

She hated the vowelizing of her name, and because she was so nimble with youth could dance away from these moods of his rather than plumb them.

"I won't be 'Annie.' Please, daddy, I'm your Ann Elizabeth."

"Ann Elizabeth, then. My Ann Elizabeth," an inner rhythm in him echoing: Sweet-Beautiful. Sweet-Beautiful.

There was actually something of the lark about her. She awoke with a song, sometimes kneeling up in bed, with her pretty brown hair tousling down over her shoulders and chirruping softly to herself into the little bird's-eye-maple dressing-table mirror, before she flung her feet over the side of the bed.

And then, innate little housekeeper that she was, it was to the preparing of breakfast with a song, her early morning full of antics. Tiptoeing in to awaken her father to the tickle of a broom straw. Spreading his breakfast piping hot, and then concealing herself behind a screen, that he might marvel at the magic of it. And once she put salt in his coffee, a fresh cup concealed behind the toast rack, and knee to knee they rocked in merriment at his grimace.

She loved thus to tease him, probably because he was so stolid that each new adventure came to him with something of a shock. He was forever being taken unawares, as if he could never become entirely accustomed to the wonder of her, and that delighted her. Even the obviousness of his slippers stuffed out with carrots could catch him napping. To her dance of glee behind him, he kept poking and poking to get into them, only the peck of her kiss upon his neck finally initiating him into the absurdity.

There was a little apartment of five rooms, twenty minutes removed by Subway from the fish store; her bedroom, all pink and yellow maple; his; a kitchen, parlor, and dining room worked out happily in white-muslin curtains, spindle-legged parlor chairs, Henry's newfangled chifferobe and bed with a fine depth of mattress, and a kitchen with eight shining pots above the sink and a border of geese, cut out to the snip of Ann's own scissors, waddling across the wall.

It was two and a half years since Mrs. Plush had died, and the boarders, as if spilled from an ark on rough seas, had struck out for diverse shores. The marvel to them now was that they had delayed so long.

"A home of our own, Ann. Pretty sweet, isn't it?"

"Oh, daddy, it is!"

"You mustn't overdo, though, baby. Sometimes we're not so strong as we think we are. A little hired girl would be best." The fish business had more than held its own.

"But I love doing it alone, dad. It--it's the next best thing to a home of--my own."

He looked startled into her dreaming eyes.

"Your own? Why, Annie, isn't this--your own?"

She laid fingers against his eyes so that he could not see the pinkiness of her.

"You know what I mean, daddy--my--very--own."

At that timid phrasing of hers Henry felt that his heart was actually strangling, as if some one were holding it back on its systolic swing, like a caught pendulum.

"Why, Annie," he said, "I never thought--"

But inevitably and of course it had happened.

The young man's name was Willis--Fred E. Willis--already credit man in a large wholesale grocery firm and two feet well on the road to advancement. A square-faced, clean-faced fellow, with a clean love of life and of Ann Elizabeth in his heart.

Henry liked him.

Ann Elizabeth loved him.

And yet, what must have been a long-smoldering flame of fear shot up through the very core of Henry's being, excoriating.

"Why, Ann Elizabeth," he kept repeating, in his slow and always inarticulate manner, "I--You--Mine--I just never thought."

She wound the softest of arms about his neck.

"I know, daddy-darlums, and I'll never leave you. Never. Fred has promised we will always be together. We'll live right here with you, or you with us."

"Annie," he cried, "you mustn't ever--marry. I mean, leave daddy--that way--anyway. You hear me? You're daddy's own. Just his by himself. Nobody is good enough for my girl."

"But, daddy," clouding up for tears, "I thought you liked Fred so much!"

"I do, but it's you I'm talking about. Nobody can have you."

"But I love him, daddy. This is terrible. I love him."

"Oh, Ann, Ann! daddy hasn't done right, perhaps, but he meant well. There are _reasons_ why he wants to keep his little girl with him always--alone--his."

"But, daddy dear, I promise you we'll never let you be lonely. Why, I couldn't stand leaving you any more than you could--"

"Not those reasons alone, Ann."

"Then what?"

"You're so young," he tried to procrastinate.

"I'll be eighteen. A woman."

All his faculties were cornered.

"You're--so--Oh, I don't know--I--"

"You haven't any reasons, dad, except dear silly ones. You can't keep me a little girl all the time, dear. I love Fred. It's all planned. Don't ruin my life, daddy--don't ruin my life."

She was lovely in her tears and surprisingly resolute in her mind, and he was more helpless than ever with her.

"Ann--you're not strong."

"Strong!" she cried, flinging back her curls and out her chest. "That is a fine excuse. I'm stronger than most. All youngsters have measles and scarlet fever and Fred says his sister Lucile out in Des Moines had St. Vitus' dance when she was eleven, just like I did. I'm stronger than you are, dad. I didn't get the flu and you did."

"You're nervous, Annie. That's why I want always to keep you at home--quiet--with me."

She sat back, her pretty eyes troubled-up lakes.

"You mean the dreams and the scared feeling, once in a while, that I can't swallow. That's nothing. I know now why I was so frightened in my sleep the other night. I told Fred, and he said it was the peach sundae on top of the crazy old movie we saw that evening. Why, Jeanette Peopping had to take a rest cure the year before she was married. Girls are always more nervous than fellows. Daddy--you--you frighten me when you look at me like that! I don't know what you mean! What-do-you-mean?"

He was helpless and at bay and took her in his arms and kissed her hair.

"I guess your old daddy is a jealous pig and can't bear to share his girl with anyone. Can't bear to--to give her up."

"You won't be giving up, daddums. I couldn't stand that, either. It will be three of us then. You'll see. Look up and smile at your Ann Elizabeth. Smile, now, smile."

And of course he did.

It was typical of her that she should be the busiest of brides-to-be, her complete little trousseau, every piece down to the dishcloths, monogrammed by her--A.E.W.

Skillful with her needle and thrifty in her purchases, the outfit when completed might have represented twice the outlay that Henry expended on it. Then there were "showers,"--linen, stocking, and even a tin one; gifts from her girl friends--cup, face, bath and guest towels; all the tremendous trifles and addenda that go to gladden the chattel-loving heart of a woman. A little secret society of her erstwhile school friends presented her with a luncheon set; the Keller twins with a silver gravy boat; and Jeanette Peopping Truman, who occupied an apartment in the same building, spent as many as three afternoons a week with her, helping to piece out a really lovely tulip-design quilt of pink and white sateen.

"Jeanette," said Ann Elizabeth, one afternoon as the two of them sat in a frothy litter of the pink and white scraps, "how did you feel that time when you had the nerv--the breakdown?"

Jeanette, pretty after a high-cheek-boned fashion and her still bright hair worn coronet fashion about her head, bit off a thread with sharp white teeth, only too eager to reminisce her ills.

"I was just about gone, that's what I was. Let anybody so much as look at me twice and, pop! I'd want to cry about it."

"And?"

"For six weeks I didn't even have enough interest to ask after Truman, who was courting me then. Oh, it was no fun, I can tell you, that nervous breakdown of mine!"

"What--else?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"Did it--was it--was it ever hard to swallow, Jeanette?"

"To swallow?"

"Yes. I mean--did you ever dream or--think--or feel so frightened you couldn't swallow?"

"I felt lots of ways, but that wasn't one of them. Swallow! Who ever heard of not swallowing?"

"But didn't you ever dream, Jeanette--terrible things--such terrible things--and get to thinking and couldn't stop yourself? Silly, ghostly--things."

Jeanette put down her sewing.

"Ann, are you quizzing me about--your mother?"

"My mother? Why my mother? Jeanette, what do you mean? Why do you ask me a thing like that? What has my mother got to do with it? Jeanette!"

Conscious that she had erred, Jeanette veered carefully back.

"Why, nothing, only I remember mamma telling me when I was just a kiddie how your mamma used to--to imagine all sorts of things just to pass the time away while she embroidered the loveliest pieces. You're like her, mamma used to say--a handy little body. Poor mamma, to think she had to be taken before Truman, junior, was born! Ah me!"

That evening, before Fred came for his two hours with her in the little parlor, Ann, rid of her checked apron and her crisp pink frock saved from the grease of frying sparks, flew in from a ring at the doorbell with a good-sized special-delivery box from a silversmith, untying it with eager, fumbling fingers, her father laying aside his newspaper to venture three guesses as to its contents.

"Another one of those syrup pitchers."

"Oh dear!"--plucking the twine--"I hope not!"

"Some more nut picks."

"Daddy, stop calamity howling. Here's the card. Des Moines, Iowa. 'From Lucile Willis, with love to her new sister.' Isn't that the sweetest! It's something with a pearl handle."

"I know. Another one of those pie-spade things."

"Wrong! Wrong! It's two pieces. Oh!"

It was a fish set of silver and mother-of-pearl. A large-bowled spoon and a sort of Neptune's fork, set up in a white-sateen bed.

"Say now, that is neat," said Henry, appraising each piece with a show of critical appreciation not really his. All this spread of the gewgaws of approaching nuptials seemed meaningless to him; bored him. Butter knives. Berry spoons. An embarrassment of nut picks and silver pitchers. A sliver of silver paper cutter with a hilt and a dog's-head handle. And now, for Fred's delectation this evening, the newly added fish set, so appropriately inscribed from his sister.

Tilting it against the lamp in the place of honor, Ann Elizabeth turned away suddenly, looking up at her father in a sudden dumb panic of which he knew nothing, her two hands at her fair, bare throat. It was so hard again to swallow. Impossible.

But finally, as was always the case, she did swallow, with a great surge of relief. A little later, seated on her father's knee and plucking at his tie in a futile fashion that he loved, she asked him:

"Daddy--about mother--"

They seldom talked of her, but always during these rare moments a beautiful mood shaped itself between them. It was as if the mere breath of his daughter's sweetly lipped use of "mother" swayed the bitter-sweet memory of the woman he carried so faithfully in the cradle of his heart.

"Yes, baby--about mother?"

"Daddy"--still fingering at the tie--"was mother--was everything all right with her up--to the very--end? I mean--no nerv--no pain? Just all of a sudden the end--quietly. Or have you told me that just to--spare me?"

She could feel him stiffen, but when his voice came it was even.

"Why, Ann, what a--question! Haven't I told you so often how mother just peacefully passed on, holding a little pink you."

Sweet-Beautiful--his heart was tolling through a sense of panic--Sweet-Beautiful.

"I know, daddy, but before--wasn't there any nerv--any sickness?"

"No," he said, rather harshly for him. "No. No. What put such ideas into your head?"

You see, he was shielding Emma way back there, and a typhoon of her words was raging through his head:

"Oh, Henry, protect me against anyone ever saying--that. Promise me."

And now, with no sense of his terrible ruthlessness, he was protecting her with her own daughter.

"Then, daddy, just one more thing," and her underlip caught while she waited for answer. "There is no other reason except your own dear silly one of loneliness--why you keep wanting me to put off my marriage?"

"No, baby," he said, finally, his words with no more depth than if his body were a hollow gourd. "What else could there be?"

Immediately, and with all the resilience of youth, she was her happy self again, kissing him through his mustache and on his now frankly bald head, which gave off the incongruous odor of violet eau de Cologne.

"Old dude daddy!" she cried, and wanted to kiss his hands, which he held suddenly very still and far from her reach.

Then the bell rang again and Fred Willis arrived. All the evening, long after Henry lay on his deep-mattressed bed, staring, the little apartment trilled to her laughter and the basso of Fred's.

* * * *

A few weeks later there occurred a strike of the delivery men and truck drivers of the city, and Henry, especially hard hit because of the perishable nature of his product, worked early and late, oftentimes loading the wagons himself and riding alongside of the precariously driving "scab."

Frequently he was as much as an hour or two late to dinner, and upon one or two occasions had tiptoed out of the house before the usual hour when Ann opened her eyes to the consciousness of his breakfast to be prepared.

They were trying days, the scheme of his universe broken into, and Henry thrived on routine.

The third week of the strike there were street riots, some of them directly in front of the fish store, and Henry came home after a day of

the unaccustomed labor of loading and unloading hampers of fish, really quite shaken.

When he arrived Ann Elizabeth was cutting around the scalloped edge of a doily with embroidery scissors, the litter of cut glass and silver things out on the table and throwing up quite a brilliance under the electric lamp, and from the kitchen the slow sizzle of waiting chops.

"Whew!" he said, as he entered, both from the whiff he emanated as he shook out of his overcoat, and from a great sense of his weariness. Loading the hampers, you understand. "Whew!"

Ann Elizabeth started violently, first at the whiff which preceded him and at his approach into the room; then sat forward, her hand closing into the arm of the chair, body thrust forward and her eyes widening like two flowers opening.

Then she rose slowly and slyly, and edged behind the table, her two hands up about her throat.

"Don't you come in here," she said, lowly and evenly. "I know you, but I'm not afraid. I'm only afraid of you at night, but not by light. You let me swallow, you hear! Get out! Get out!"

Rooted, Henry stood.

"Why, Annie!" he said in the soothing voice from out of his long ago, "Annie--it's daddy!"

"No, you don't," she cried, springing back as he took the step forward. "My daddy'll kill you if he finds you here. He'll slit you up from your tail right up to your gill. He knows how. I'm going to tell him and Fred on you. You won't let me swallow. You're slippery. I can't stand it. Don't you come near me! Don't!"

"Annie!" he cried. "Good God! Annie, it's daddy who loves you!" Poor Henry, her voice was still under a whisper and in his agony he committed the error of rushing at her. "Annie, it's daddy! See, your own dear daddy!"

But she was too quick. Her head thrown back so that the neck muscles strained out like an outraged deer's cornered in the hunt and her eyes rolled up, Ann felt for and grasped the paper knife off the trinket-littered table.

"Don't you touch me--slit you up from tail to your gills."

"Annie, it's daddy! Papa! For God's sake look at daddy--Ann! God!" And caught her wrist in the very act of its plumb-line rush for his heart.

He was sweating in his struggle with her, and most of all her strength appalled him, she was so little for her terrible unaccountable power.

"Don't touch me! You can't! You haven't any arms! Horrible gills!"

She was talking as she struggled, still under the hoarse and frantic whisper, but her breath coming in long soughs. "Slit-you-up-from-tail. Slit--you--up--from--tail--to--gills."

"Annie! Annie!" still obsessed by his anguished desire to reassure her with the normality of his touch. "See, Annie, it's daddy. Ann Elizabeth's daddy." With a flash her arm and the glint of the paper cutter eluded him again and again, but finally he caught her by the waist, struggling, in his dreadful mistake, to calm her down into the chair again.

"Now I've got you, darling. Now--sit--down--"

"No, you haven't," she said, a sort of wild joy coming out in her whisper, and cunningly twisting the upper half of her body back from his, the hand still held high. "You'll never get me--you fish!"

And plunged with her high hand in a straight line down into her throat.

It was only when the coroner withdrew the sliver of paper knife from its whiteness, that, coagulated, the dead and waiting blood began to ooze.

* * * * *

"Do you," intoned the judge for the third and slightly more impatient time, "plead guilty or not guilty to the charge of murder against you?"

This time the lips of the prisoner's wound of a mouth moved stiffly together:

"Guilty."



AT THE FOOT OF THE TRAIL

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I

The slope in front of old Mosey's cabin was a mass of purple lupine. Behind the house the wild oats were dotted with brodiaea, waving on long, glistening stems. The California lilac was in bloom on the trail, and its clumps of pale blossoms were like breaks in the chaparral, showing the blue sky beyond.

In the corral between the house and the mountain-side stood a dozen or more burros, wearing that air of patient resignation common to very good women and very obstinate beasts. Old Mosey himself was pottering about the corral, feeding his stock. He stooped now and then with the unwillingness of years, and erected himself by slow, rheumatic stages. The donkeys crowded about the fence as he approached with a forkful of alfalfa hay, and he pushed them about with the flat of the prongs, calling them by queer, inappropriate names.

A young man in blue overalls came around the corner of the house, swinging a newly trimmed manzanita stick.

"Hello, Mosey!" he called. "Here I am again, as hungry as a coyote. What's the lay-out? Cottontail on toast and patty de foy grass?"

The old man grinned, showing his worn, yellow teeth.

"I'll be there in a minute," he said. "Just set down on the step."

The young fellow came toward the corral.

"I've got a job on the trail," he said. "I'm going down-town for my traps. Who named 'em for you?" he questioned, as the old man swore softly at the Democratic candidate for President.

"Oh, the women, mostly. They take a lot of interest in 'em when they start out; they're afraid I ain't good to them. They don't say so much about it when they get back."

"They're too tired, I suppose."

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"You let out five this morning, didn't you? I met them on my way down. The girl in bloomers seemed to be scared; she gave a little screech

every few minutes. The others didn't appear to mind."

"Oh, she wasn't afraid. Women don't make a noise when they're scared; it's only when they want to scare somebody else."

The young fellow leaned against the fence and laughed, with a final whoop. A gray donkey investigated his hip pocket, and he reached back and prodded the intruder with his stick.

"You seem to be up on the woman question, Mosey. It's queer you ain't married."

The old man was lifting a boulder to hold down a broken bale of hay, and made no reply. His visitor started toward the cabin. The old man adjusted another boulder and trotted after his guest, brushing the hay from his flannel shirt. A column of blue-white smoke arose from the rusty stovepipe in the cabin roof, and the smell of overdone coffee drifted out upon the spiced air.

"I was just about settin' down," said the host, placing another plate and cup and saucer on the blackened redwood table. "I'll fry you some more bacon and eggs."

The visitor watched him as he hurried about with the short, uncertain steps of hospitable old age.

"By gum, Mosey, I'd marry a grass-widow with a second-hand family before I'd do my own cooking."

The young fellow gave a self-conscious laugh that made the old man glance at him from under his weather-beaten straw hat.

"Your mind seems to run on marryin'," he said; "guess you're hungry. Set up and have some breakfast."

The visitor drew up a wooden chair, and the old man poured two cups of black coffee from the smoke-begrimed coffee-pot and returned it to the stove. Then he took off his hat and seated himself opposite his guest. The latter stirred three heaping teaspoonfuls of sugar into his cup, muddled the resulting syrup with condensed milk, and drank it with the relish of abnormal health.

"I tell you what, Mosey," he said, reaching for a slice of bacon and dripping the grease across the table, "there ain't any flies on the women when it comes to housekeeping. Now, a woman would turn on the soapsuds and float you clean out of this house; then she'd mop up, and put scalloped noospapers on all the shelves, and little white aprons on the windows, and pillow-shams on your bunk, and she'd work a doily for you to lay your six-shooter on, with 'God bless our home' in the corner of it; and she'd make you so comfortable you wouldn't know what to do

with yourself."

"I'm comfortable enough by myself," said the old man uneasily. "When you work for yourself, you know who's boss."

"Naw, you don't, Mosey, not by a long shot; you don't know whether you're boss or the cookin'. I tried bachin' once"--the speaker made a grimace of reminiscent disgust; "the taste hasn't gone out of my mouth yet. You're a pretty fair cook, Mosey, but you'd ought to see my girl's biscuits; she makes 'em so light she has to put a napkin over 'em to keep 'em from floating around like feathers. Fact!" He reached over and speared a slice of bread with his fork. "If I keep this job on the trail, maybe you'll have a chance to sample them biscuits. I'm goin' to send East for that girl."

"Where you goin' to live?"

"Well, I didn't know but we could rent this ranch and board you, Mosey. Seems to me you ought to retire. It ain't human to live this way. If you was to die here all by yourself, you'd regret it. Well, I must toddle."

The visitor stood a moment on the step, sweeping the valley with his fresh young glance; then he set his hat on the back of his head and went whistling down the road, waving his stick at old Mosey as he disappeared among the sycamores in the wash. The old man gathered the dishes into a rusty pan, and scalded them with boiling water from the kettle.

"I believe I'll do it," he said, as he fished the hot saucers out by their edges and turned them down on the table; "it can't do no harm to write to her, no way."

II

Mrs. Moxom put on her slat sunbonnet, took a tin pan from the pantry shelf, and hurried across the kitchen toward the door. Her daughter-in-law looked up from the corner where she was kneading bread. She was a short, plump woman, and all of her convexities seemed emphasized by flour. She put up the back of her hand to adjust a loosened lock of hair, and added another high light to her forehead.

"Where you going, mother?" she called anxiously.

The old woman did not turn her head.

"Oh, just out to see how the lettuce is coming on. I had a notion I'd like some for dinner, wilted with ham gravy."

"Can't one of the children get it?"

There was no response. Mrs. Weaver turned back to her bread.

"Your grandmother seems kind of fidgety this morning," she fretted to her eldest daughter, who was decorating the cupboard shelves with tissue paper of an enervating magenta hue, and indulging at intervals in vocal reminiscences of a ship that never returned.

"Oh, well, mother," said that young person comfortably, "let her alone. I think we all tag her too much. I hate to be tagged myself."

"Well, I'm sure I don't want to tag her, Ethel; I just don't want her to overdo."

Mrs. Weaver spoke in a tone of mingled injury and self-justification.

"Oh, well, mother, she isn't likely to put her shoulder out of joint pulling a few heads of lettuce."

The girl broke out again into cheerful interrogations concerning the disaster at sea:--

"Did she never_r_ re_tur_ren?
No, she never_r_ re_tur_rened."

Mrs. Weaver gave a little sigh, as if she feared her daughter's words might prove prophetic, and buried her plump fists in the puffy dough.

Old Mrs. Moxom turned when she reached the garden gate and glanced back at the house. Then she clasped the pan to her breast and skurried along the fence toward the orchard. Once under the trees, she did not look behind her, but went rapidly toward the field where she knew her son was plowing. The reflection of the sun on the tin pan made him look up, and when he saw her he stopped his team. She came across the soft brown furrows to his side.

"I'd have come to the fence when I saw you, if I hadn't had the colt," he said kindly. "What's wanted?"

The old woman's face twitched. She pushed her sunbonnet back with one trembling hand.

"Jason," she said, with a little jerk in her voice, "your paw's alive."

The man arranged the lines carefully along the colt's back; then he took off his hat and wiped the top of his head on his sleeve, looking away from his mother with heavy, dull embarrassment.

"I expect you'd 'most forgot all about him," pursued the old woman, with a vague reproach in her tone.

"I hadn't much to forget," answered the man, resentment rising in his voice. "He hasn't troubled himself about me."

"Well, he didn't know anything about you, Jason, he went away so soon after we was married. It's a dreadful position to be placed in. It 'u'd be awfully embarrassing to--to the Moxom girls."

The man gave her a quick, curious glance. He had never heard her speak of his half-sisters in that way before.

"They're so kind of high-toned," she went on, "just as like as not they'd blame me. I'm sure I don't know what to do."

Jason kicked the soft earth with his sunburnt boot.

"Where is he?" he asked sullenly.

"In Californay."

"How'd you hear?"

"I got a letter. He wrote to Burtonville and directed it to Mrs. Angeline Weaver, and the postmaster give it to some of your uncle Samuel's folks, and they put it in another envelope and backed it to me here. I thought at first I wouldn't say anything about it, but it seemed as if I'd ought to tell you; it doesn't hurt you any, but it's awful hard on the--the Moxom girls."

The man shifted his weight, and kicked awhile with his other foot.

"Well, I'd just give him the go-by," he announced resolutely. "You're a decent man's widow, and that's enough. He's never"--

"Oh, I ain't saying anything against your step-paw, Jason," the old woman broke in anxiously. "He was an awful good man. It seems queer to think it was the way it was. Dear me, it's all so kind of confusing!"

The poor woman looked down with much the same embarrassment over her matrimonial redundancy that a man might feel when suddenly confronted by twins.

"I'm sure I don't see how I could help thinking he was dead," she went on after a little silence, "when he wrote he was going off on that trip and might never come back, and the man that was with him wrote that they got lost from each other, and water was so scarce and all that. And then, you know, I didn't get married again till you was 'most ten years old, Jason. I'm sure I don't know what to do. I don't want to mortify anybody, but I'd like to know just what's my dooty."

"Well, I can tell you easy enough." The man's voice was getting beyond

control, but he drew it in with a quick, angry breath. "Just drop the whole thing. If he's got on for forty years, mother, I guess he can manage for the rest of the time."

"But it ain't so easy managin' when you begin to get old, Jason. I know how that is."

Her son jerked the lines impatiently, and the colt gave a nervous start.

"I suppose you know this farm really came to you from your paw, don't you, Jason?" she asked humbly.

"Don't know as I did," answered the man, without enthusiasm.

"Well, you see, after we was married, your grandfather Weaver offered your paw this quarter-section if he'd stay here in Ioway; but he had his heart set on going to Californay, and didn't want it; so after it turned out the way it did, and you was born, your grandfather gave me this farm, and I done very well with it. That's the reason your step-paw insisted on you having it when we was dividing things up before he died."

"Seems to me father worked pretty hard on this place himself."

The man said the word "father" half defiantly.

"Mr. Moxom? Oh, yes, he was a first-rate manager, and the kindest man that ever drew breath. I remember when your sister Angie was born--oh, dear me!"--the old woman felt her voice giving way, and stopped an instant,--"it seems so kind of strange. Well, I guess we'd better just drop it, Jason. I must go back to the house. Emma didn't like my coming for lettuce. She'll think I've planted some, and am waitin' for it to come up."

She gave her son a quivering smile as she turned away. He stood still and watched her until she had crossed the plowed ground. It seemed to him she walked more feebly than when she came out.

"That's awful queer," he said, shaking his head, "calling her own daughters 'the Moxom girls.'"

III

Ethel Weaver had been to Ashland for the mail, and was driving home in the summer dusk. A dash of rain had fallen while she was in the village, and the air was full of the odor of moist earth and the sweetness of growing corn. The colt she was driving held his head high, glancing from side to side with youthful eagerness for a sensation, and shying at nothing now and then in sheer excess of emotion over the demand of his

monotonous life.

The girl held a letter in her lap, turning the pages with one unincumbered hand, and lifting her flushed face with a contemptuous "Oh, Barney, you goose!" as the colt drew himself into attitudes of quivering fright, which dissolved suddenly at the sound of her voice and the knowledge that another young creature viewed his coquettish terrors with the disrespect born of comprehension. As they turned into the lane west of the house, Ethel folded her letter and thrust it hastily into her pocket, and the colt darted through the open gate and drew up at the side door with a transparent assumption of serious purpose suggested by the proximity of oats.

"Ed!" called the girl, "the next time you hitch up Barney for me, I wish you'd put a kicking-strap on him. I had a picnic with him coming down the hill by Arbuckle's."

Ed maintained the gruff silence of the half-grown rural male as he climbed into the buggy beside his sister and cramped the wheel for her to dismount.

"They haven't any quart jars over at the store, mother," said Ethel, entering the house and walking across to the mirror to remove her hat. "They're expecting some every day. Well, I do look like the Witch of Endor!" she exclaimed, twisting her loosened rope of hair and skewering it in place with a white celluloid pin. "That colt acted as if he was possessed."

"Oh, I'm sorry about the jars," said Mrs. Weaver regretfully. "I wanted to finish putting up the curr'n's to-morrow."

"Did you get any mail?" quavered grandmother Moxom.

"I got a letter from Rob."

There was a little hush in the room. The girl stood still before the mirror, with a sense of support in the dim reflection of her own face.

"Is he well?" ventured the old woman feebly, glancing toward her daughter-in-law.

"Yes, he's well; he's got steady work on some road up the mountain. He writes as if people keep going up, but he never tells what they go up for. He said something about a lot of burros, and at first I thought he was in a furniture store, but I found out he meant mules. An old man keeps them, and hires them out to people. Rob calls him 'old Mosey.' They're keeping bach together. Rob tried to make biscuits, and he says they tasted like castor oil."

As her granddaughter talked, Mrs. Moxom seemed to shrink deeper and

deeper into the patchwork cushion of her chair.

"Rob wants me to come out there and be married," pursued the girl, bending nearer to the mirror and returning her own gaze with sympathy.

"Why, Ethel!" Mrs. Weaver's voice was full of astonished disapproval. "I should think you'd be ashamed to say such a thing."

"I didn't say it; Rob said it," returned the girl, making a little grimace at herself in the glass.

"Well, I have my opinion of a young man that will say such a thing to a girl. If a girl's worth having, she's worth coming after."

Mrs. Weaver made this latter announcement with an air of triumph in its triteness. Her daughter gave a little sniff of contempt.

"Well, if a fellow's worth having, isn't he worth going to?" she asked with would-be flippancy.

"Why, Ethel Imogen Weaver!" Mrs. Weaver repeated her daughter's name slowly, as if she hoped its length might arouse in the owner some sense of her worth. "I never did hear the like."

The girl left the mirror, and seated herself in a chair in front of her mother.

"It'll cost Rob a hundred dollars to come here and go back to California, and a hundred dollars goes a long way toward fixing up. Besides, he'll lose his job. I'd just as soon go out there as have him come here. If people don't like it they--they needn't."

The girl's fresh young voice began to thicken, and she glanced about in restless search of diversion from impending tears.

"Well, girls do act awful strange these days."

Mrs. Weaver took warning from her daughter's tone and divided her disapproval by multiplying its denominator.

"Yes, they do. They act sometimes as if they had a little sense," retorted Ethel huskily.

"Well, I don't know as I call it sense to pick up and run after a man, even if you're engaged to him; do you, mother?"

Old Mrs. Moxom started nervously at her daughter-in-law's appeal.

"Well, it does seem a long way to go on--on an uncertainty, Ethel," she faltered.

The girl turned a flushed, indignant face upon her grandmother.

"Well, I hope you don't mean to call Rob an uncertainty?" she demanded angrily.

"Oh, no; I don't mean that," pleaded the old woman. "I haven't got anything agen' Rob. I don't suppose he's any more uncertain than--than the rest of them. I"--

"Why, grandmother Moxom," interrupted the girl, "how you talk! I'm sure father isn't an uncertainty, and there wasn't anything uncertain about grandfather Moxom. To tell the honest truth, I think they're just about as certain as we are."

The old woman got up and began to move the chairs about with purposeless industry.

"It's awful hard to know what to do sometimes," she said, indulging in a generality that might be mollifying, but was scarcely glittering.

"Well, it isn't hard for me to know _this_ time," said Mrs. Weaver, her features drawn into a look of pudgy determination. "No girl of mine shall ever go traipsing off to California alone on any such wild-goose chase."

Ethel got up and moved toward the stairway, her tawny head thrown back, and an eloquent accentuation of heel in her tread.

"I just believe old folks like for young folks to be foolish and wasteful," she said over her shoulder, "so they can have something to nag them about. I'm sure I"--She slammed the door upon her voice, which seemed to be carried upward in a little whirlwind of indignation.

Mrs. Weaver glanced at her mother-in-law for sympathy, but the old woman refused to meet her gaze.

"I'm just real mad at Rob Kendall for suggesting such a thing and getting Ethel all worked up," clucked the younger woman anxiously.

Mrs. Moxom came back to her chair as aimlessly as she had left it.

"Men-folks are kind of helpless when it comes to planning," she said apologetically. "To think of them poor things trying to keep house--and the biscuits being soggy! It does kind of work on her feelings, Emma."

Mrs. Weaver gave her mother-in-law a glance of rotund severity.

"I don't mind their getting married," she said, "but I want it done decent. I don't intend to pack my daughter off to any man as if she

wasn't worth coming after, biscuits or no biscuits!"

She lifted her chin and looked at her companion over the barricade of conventionality that lay between them with the air of one whose position is unassailable. The old woman sighed with much the same air, but with none of her daughter-in-law's satisfaction in it.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said drearily; "sometimes it ain't easy to know your dooty at a glance."

Mrs. Weaver made no response, but her expression was not favorable to such lax uncertainty.

"The way mother Moxom talked," she said to her husband that night, "you'd have thought she sided with Ethel."

Jason Weaver was far too much of a man to hazard an opinion on the proprieties in the face of his wife's disapproval, so he grunted an amiable acquiescence in that spirit of justifiable hypocrisy known among his kind as "humoring the women-folks." Privately he was disposed to exult in his daughter's spirit and good sense, and so long as these admirable qualities did not take her away from him, and paternal pride and affection were both gratified, he saw no reason to complain. This satisfaction, however, did not prevent his "stirring her up" now and then, as he said, that he might sun himself in the glow of her youthful temper and chuckle inwardly over her smartness.

"Well, Dot, how's Rob?" he asked jovially one evening at supper about a month later. "Does he still think he's worth running after?"

"I don't know whether he thinks so or not, but I know he is," asserted the young woman, tilting her chin and looking away from her father with a cool filial contempt for his pleasantries bred by familiarity. "He's well enough, but the old man that lives with him had a fall and broke his leg, and Rob has to take care of him."

Old Mrs. Moxom laid down her knife and fork, and dropped her hands in her lap hopelessly.

"Well, now, what made him go and do that?" she asked, with a fretful quaver in her voice, as if this were the last straw.

"I don't know, grandmother," answered Ethel cheerfully. "As soon as he's well enough to be moved, they're going to take him to the county hospital. I guess that's the poorhouse. But Rob says he's so old they're afraid the bone won't knit; he suffers like everything. Poor old man, I'm awful sorry for him. Rob has to do all the cooking."

The old woman pushed back her chair and brushed the crumbs from her apron.

"I guess I'll go upstairs and lay down awhile, Emma. I been kind of light-headed all afternoon. I guess I set too long over them carpet rags."

She got up and crossed the room hurriedly. Her son looked after her with anxious eyes. Presently they heard her toiling up the stairs with the slow, inelastic tread of infancy and old age.

"I don't know what's come over your mother, Jason," said his wife. "She hasn't been herself all summer. Sometimes I think I'd ought to write to the girls."

"Oh, I guess she'll be all right," said Jason, with masculine hopefulness. "Dot, you'd better go up by and by and see if grandmother wants anything."

Safe in her own room, Mrs. Moxom sank into a chair with a long breath of relief and dismay.

"The poorhouse!" she gasped. "That seems about as mortifying as to own up to your girls that you wasn't never rightly married to their father."

She got up and wandered across the room to the bureau. "I expect he's changed a good deal," she murmured. She took a daguerreotype from the upper drawer, and gazed at it curiously. "Yes, I expect he's changed quite a good deal," she repeated, with a sigh.

IV

"Why, mother Moxom!"

Mrs. Weaver sank into her sewing-chair in an attitude of pulpy despair.

"Well, I don't see but what it's the best thing for me to do," asserted the old woman. "The cold weather'll be coming on soon, and I always have more or less rheumatism, and they say Californay's good for rheumatism. Besides, I think I need to stir round a little; I've stayed right here 'most too close; and as long as Ethel has her heart set on going, I don't see but what it's the best plan. If I go along with her, I can make sure that everything's all right. If you and Jason say she can't go, why, then, I don't see but what I'll just have to start off and make the trip alone."

"Why, mother Moxom, I just don't know what to say!"

Mrs. Weaver's tone conveyed a deep-seated sense of injury that she should thus be deprived of speech for such insufficient cause.

"Tisn't such a very hard trip," pursued the old woman doggedly. "They say you get on one of them through trains and take your provision and your knitting, and just live along the road. It isn't as if you had to change cars at every junction, and get so turned round you don't know which way your head's set on your shoulders."

Mrs. Weaver's expression began to dissolve into reluctant interest in these details.

"Well, of course, if you think it'll help your rheumatism, and you've got your mind made up to go, _some_body'll have to go with you. Have you asked Jason?"

"No, I haven't." Mrs. Moxom's voice took on an edge. "I can't see just why I've got to ask people; sometimes I think I'm about old enough to do as I please."

"Why, of course, mother," soothed the daughter-in-law. "Would you go and see the girls before you'd start?"

"No, I don't believe I would," answered the old woman, her voice relaxing under this acquiescence. "They'd only make a fuss. They've both got good homes and good men, and they're married to them right and lawful, and there's nothing to worry about. Besides, I'd just get interested in the children, and that'd make it harder. I've done the best I knew how by the girls, and I don't know as they've got any reason to complain"--

"Why, no, mother," interrupted the daughter-in-law, with rising feathers, "I never heard anybody say but what you'd done well by all your children. I only thought they'd want to see you. I think they'd come over if they knew it--well, of course, Angie couldn't, having a young baby so, but Laura she'd come in a minute."

"Well, I don't believe I want to see them," persisted Mrs. Moxom. "It'll only make it harder. I guess you needn't let them know I'm goin'. Ethel and I'll start as soon as she can get ready. Seems like Rob's having a pretty hard time. He couldn't come after Ethel now if he wanted to. It wouldn't be right for him to leave that--that--old gentleman."

"Well, I wouldn't want the girls to have any hard feelings towards me."

"The Moxom girls ain't a-going to have any hard feelings towards _you_, Emma," asserted the old woman, with emphasis.

"She has the queerest way of talking about your sisters, Jason," Mrs. Weaver confided to her husband later. "It makes me think, sometimes, she's failing pretty fast."

As the road to the foot of the trail grew steeper, Rob Kendall found an increasing difficulty in guiding his team with one hand. His bride drew herself from his encircling arm reluctantly.

"You'd better look after the horses," she said, with a vivid blush.
"What'll grandmother think of us?"

The young fellow removed the offending arm and reached back to pat the old lady's knee.

"I ain't afraid of grandmother," he said joyously. "Grandmother's a brick. If she stays out here long, she'll soon be the youngest woman on the mesa. I shouldn't wonder if she'd pick up some nice old gentleman herself--how's that, grandmother?" He bent down and kissed his wife's ear. "Catch me going back on grandmothers after this!"

"You haven't changed a bit, Rob," said Ethel fondly; "has he, grandmother?" She turned her radiant smile upon the withered face behind her.

The old woman did not answer. The newly wedded couple resumed their rapturous contemplation of each other.

"How's that funny old man, Rob?" asked Ethel, smoothing out her dimples.

"Old Mosey? He's pretty rocky. I'm afraid he won't pull through." Rob strove to adjust his voice to the subject. "I'd 'a' got a house down in town, but I didn't like to leave him. We'll have to go pretty soon, though. I'm afraid you'll be lonesome up here."

The old woman on the back seat leaned forward a little. The young couple smiled exultantly into each other's eyes, with superb scorn of the world.

"Lonesome!" sneered the girl.

Her husband drew her close to him with an ecstatic hug.

"Yes, lonesome," he laughed, his voice smothered in her bright hair.

The old woman settled back in her seat. The team made their way slowly through the sandy wash between the boulders. When they emerged from the sycamores, Rob pointed toward the cabin. "That's the place!" he said triumphantly.

The sunset was sifting through the live-oaks upon the shake roof. Two tents gleamed white beside it, frescoed with the shadow of moving leaves. Ethel lifted her head from her husband's shoulder, and looked at

her home with the faith in her eyes that has kept the world young.

"I've put up some tents for us," said the young fellow gleefully; "but you mustn't go in till I get the team put away. I won't have you laughing at my housekeeping behind my back. Old Mosey's asleep in the shanty; the doctor gives him something to keep him easy. You can go in there and sit down, grandmother; you won't disturb him."

He helped them out of the wagon, lingering a little with his wife in his arms. The old woman left them and went into the house. She crossed the floor hesitatingly, and bent over the feeble old face on the pillow.

"It's just as I expected; he's changed a good deal," she said to herself.

The old man opened his eyes.

"I was sayin' you'd changed a good deal, Moses," she repeated aloud.

There was no intelligence in his gaze.

"For that matter, I expect I've changed a good deal myself," she went on. "I heard you'd had a fall, and I thought I'd better come out. You was always kind of hard to take care of when you was sick. I remember that time you hurt your foot on the scythe, just after we was married; you wouldn't let anybody come near you but me"--

"Why, it's Angeline!" said the old man dreamily, with a vacant smile.

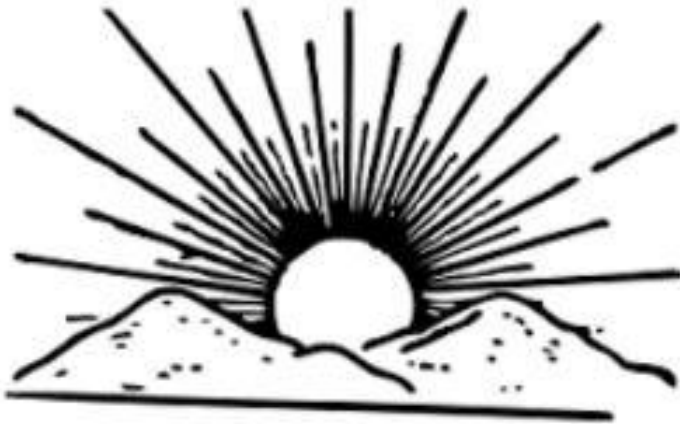
"Yes, it's me."

He closed his eyes and drifted away again. The old wife sat still on the edge of the bed. Outside she could hear the sigh of the oaks and the trill of young voices. Two or three tears fell over the wrinkled face, written close with the past, like a yellow page from an old diary. She wiped them away, and looked about the room with its meagre belongings, which Rob had scoured into expectant neatness.

"He doesn't seem to have done very well," she thought; "but how could he, all by himself?" She got up and walked to the door, and looked out at the strange landscape with its masses of purple mountains.

"I've got to do one of two things," she said to herself. "I've just got to own up the whole thing, and let the girls be mortified, or else I've got to keep still and marry him over again, and pass for an old fool the rest of my life. I don't believe I can do it. They've got more time to live down disgrace than I have. I believe I'll just come out and tell everything. Ethel!" she called. "Come here, you and Rob; I've got something to tell you."

The young couple stood with locked arms, looking out over the valley. At the sound of her voice they clasped each other close in an embrace of passionate protest against the intrusion of this other soul. Then they turned toward the sunset, and went slowly and reluctantly into the house.



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